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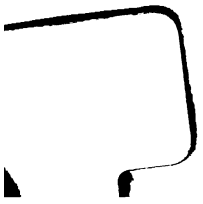

IN SILK ATTIRE.

VOL. II.

IN SILK ATTIRE.

A Novel.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,
AUTHOR OF "LOVE OR MARRIAGE?"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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IN SILK ATTIRE.

CHAPTER I.

THE OUTCAST.

"QUITE true, my dear," said Mr. Anerley, gently. "If I had risen at six, gone and dipped myself in the river, and then taken a walk, I should have been in a sufficiently self-satisfied and virtuous frame of mind to have accompanied you to church. But I try to avoid carnal pride. Indeed, I don't know how Satan managed to develope so much intolerable vanity, unless he was in the habit of rising at a prodigiously early hour and taking a cold bath."

"Oh, papa, how dare you say such a thing?" said a soft voice just beside him;

and he turned to the open breakfast-room window to see Dove's pretty face, under a bright little summer bonnet, looking in at him reproachfully.

"Come, get away to church, both of you," he said. "There goes the cracked bell."

So Mrs. Anerley and Dove went alone to church; the former very silent and sad. The tender little woman could do nothing for this husband of hers—nothing but pray for him, in an inaudible way, during those moments of solemn silence which occur between divisions of the service.

A quarter of an hour afterwards Mr. Anerley rose, and also walked along to the little grey building. All the people by this time were inside; and as he entered the churchyard, the choir was singing. He sate down on one of the gravestones that were placed among the long, green, rank grass; and having pulled his straw hat over his

forehead, to shelter his eyes and face from the strong sunlight, he listened, in a dreamy way, to the sweet singing of the children, and the solemn and soft intoning of the organ.

It was his favourite method of going to church.

"You get all the emotional exaltation of the service," he used to say, "without having your intellect ruffled. And when the children have done their singing, instead of listening to a feeble sermon, you sit out in the clear sunlight and look down on the quiet valley, and the river, and the trees."

So he sate, and listened and dreamed, while the softened music played upon his fancies, and produced a moving panorama of pious scenes—of the old Jew-life, the early Christian wanderings, the mediæval mysteries, and superstitions, and heroisms.

"How fortunate religion has been," he

thought, "to secure the exclusive aid of music and architecture! Philosophy and science have had to fight their way single-handed; but she has come armed with weapons of emotional coercion to over-awe and convince the intellectually unimpressionable. In a great cathedral, with slow, sonorous chanting reverberating through the long stone galleries, and tapers lit in the mysterious twilight, every man thinks it is religion, not art, which almost forces him down upon his knees."

Here the music ceased abruptly, and presently there was a confused murmur of syllables—the clergyman either preaching or reading.

"Sermons are like Scotch bagpipes," said Mr. Anerley to himself, as he rose and left the churchyard to wander down to the river-side. "They sound very well when one doesn't hear them."

That very day there was a conspiracy formed against the carnal peace of mind of this aimlessly speculating philosopher. Mr. Bexley's sermon had been specially touching to the few ladies who attended the little church; and the tender, conjugal soul of Mrs. Anerley was grieved beyond measure as she thought of the outcast whom she had left behind. Rhetorical threats of damnation passed lightly over her; indeed, you cannot easily persuade a woman that the lover of her youth has any cause to fear eternal punishment: but a far less sensitive woman than Mrs. Anerley might well have been saddened by that incomprehensible barrier which existed between her and her husband.

"And it is only on this one point," she thought to herself, bitterly. "Was there ever such a husband as he is—so forbearing, and kind, and generous? Was there ever

such a father as he has shown himself to be, both to Will and to this poor Dove? And yet they talk of him as if he were a great sinner; and I know that Mrs. Bexley said she feared he was among the lost."

Be sure Mrs. Bexley did not gain in Mrs. Anerley's esteem by that unhappy conjecture. From the moment of its utterance, the two women, though they outwardly met with cold courtesy, were sworn enemies; and a feud which owed its origin to the question of the eternal destiny of a human soul, condescended to exhibit itself in a bitter rivalry as to which of the two disputants should be able to wear the most stylish bonnet. Was it the righteousness of her cause, or her husband's longer purse, which generally gave Mrs. Anerley the victory over the chagrined and mortified wife of the pastor?

But with Mr. Bexley, Mrs. Anerley con-

tinued on the most friendly terms; and on this day, so anxious was she, poor soul, to see her husband united to her in the bonds of faith, that she talked to Mr. Bexley for a few minutes, and begged him to call round in the evening and try the effect of spiritual counsel on this sheep who had wandered from the fold.

Mr. Bexley was precisely the man to undertake such a responsibility with gladness—nay, with eagerness. Many a time had he dined at Mr. Anerley's house; but being a gentleman as well as a clergyman, he did not seek to take advantage of his position and turn the kindly after-dinner talk of the household into a professional *séance*. But when he was appealed to by the wife of the mentally sick man he responded joyously. He was a very shy and nervously sensitive man—as you could have seen from his fine, lank, yellow hair, the sin-

gular purity of his complexion, the weakness of his eyes, and a certain spasmodic affection of the corner of his lips—but he had no fear of ridicule when he was on his Master's service. Mr. Anerley and he, indeed, were great friends; and the former, though he used to laugh at the clergyman's ignorance of guns and rods, and at his almost childish optimism, respected him as one honest man respects another. The rationalist looked upon the supernaturalisms of this neighbour of his with much curiosity, some wonder, and a little admiration. Yet he never could quite account for these phenomena. He could not understand, for instance, why one of the most subtle and dispassionate minds of our day should sadly address an old friend as from the other side of the grave, simply because the latter was removed from him by a few (to Mr. Anerley) unimportant and merely technical doctrinal points. Mr.

Bexley was a constant puzzle to him. Indeed, the firmest facts in Mr. Bexley's theory of life were what a Sensationalist would at once put down as delusions or mere hypotheses. He was full of the most exalted ideas of duty, of moral responsibility, of the value of fine shades of opinion and psychical experience. He worshipped Dr. Newman, whose verses he regarded as a new light thrown upon the history of the soul. He had a passionate admiration for the *Spectator;* and shed, at least, a good deal of political enlightenment upon his parish by insisting on the farmers around reading each number as it was sent down from London. Mr. Bexley ought never to have been in the service of a State church. He had the "prophetic" instinct. Proselytism came as natural to him as the act of walking. He abhorred and detested leaving things alone, and letting them right themselves. This

Kentish Jonah found a Nineveh wherever he went; he was never afraid to attack it single-handed; and most of all, he raised his voice against the materialists and sensationalists—the destroyers of the beautiful idealisms of the soul.

When one's wife and her favourite clergyman enter into league against one's convictions, the chances are that the convictions will suffer. Such combinations are unfair. There are some men, for example, who would refuse to be attended by a doctor who was on very friendly terms with an undertaker; they fear the chance of collusion.

It was almost dusk when Mr. Bexley went round to Chesnut Bank, and then he found Mr. Anerley seated outside, on a carved oaken bench, under some lime-trees fronting the lawn. He was alone, and on the rude table before him were some decan-

ters and bottles, one or two fruit-plates, and a box of cigars.

"Oh, good evening, Mr. Bexley," said the lost one; "will you have a cigar?"

"Thank you."

"Sit down. That's claret next you, and there's still some sparkling Burgundy in the bottle. The children are very fond of it—I suppose because it looks like currant-jelly in hysterics."

Cigars and claret don't seem quite the avenue by which to approach an inquiry into the condition of a man's soul; but Mr. Bexley was too excited to heed what he did. He had the proselytising ecstasy upon him. He was like one of the old crusaders about to ride up to the gate of a godless Saracen city and demand its surrender. Did not Greatheart, when about to engage with the giant, refresh himself with the wine which Christiana carried?

"You were not at church this morning," he said, carelessly.

But his assumed carelessness was too evident; his *forte* was not diplomacy.

"Well, no," said Mr. Anerley, quietly: he did not take the trouble to reflect on the object of the question, for he had been considering graver matters when Mr. Bexley arrived.

"You have not been to church for a long time," continued the yellow-haired, soft-voiced preacher, insidiously but nervously. "Indeed, you don't seem to think church-going of any importance."

Mr. Anerley made no answer. Then the other, driven out of the diplomatic method of approach into his natural manner, immediately said—

"Mr. Anerley, do you never think that it is a man's duty to think about things which are not of this world? Do you expect

always to be satisfied with worldly good? You and I have had long conversations together; and I have found you so reasonable, so unprejudiced, so free to conviction, that I am amazed you do not recognise the necessity of thinking of something beyond this life that we lead just now."

"Cannot people think of these things outside a church, Mr. Bexley?" he said; but his face was quite grave, if not sad. "As you came into the garden just now, I was perplexing myself with that very question. I was sitting wondering if I should die and become nothing without having discovered how it was I came to live. It seems so singular that one should pass out of consciousness into the inorganic earth without having discovered what the earth is, and without having the least notion of how he himself came to be. Geology only presents you with a notion of tremendous time and

change—it gives no clue to the beginning. And if there was no beginning, how is it that my brief consciousness only flickers up for a short time, and dies down again into darkness and night? How did there come to be a beginning to my consciousness?"

Mr. Bexley was astounded and grieved. He was accustomed, even in that little parish, to find people who had painful doubts about the Mosaic record of creation, who seemed perplexed about the sun, moon, and stars having all been created in order to light up the earth, and who accepted with joy and gladness any possible theory of reconciliation which gave them a more rational view of the world and their belief in the Bible at the same time. But he had not met a man who had passed to one side, as quite unworthy of attention, all theologic solutions of the difficulty whatever.

The very novelty of the obstacle, however,

only excited his evangelical fervour. He avowed his object in having visited Chesnut Bank that evening (without, however, revealing at whose suggestion he had undertaken the task), and boldly endeavoured to grapple with the demon of unbelief which had possession of his friend's mind. He insisted on the fallibility of human reason. He pointed out that, without religion, morality was unable to make its way among the uneducated. He demonstrated that every age had its own proper religion, and that an age without a religion was on the brink of suicide. All these things, and many more, he urged with much eloquence and undoubted sincerity, and at the end he was surprised to learn that his auditor quite coincided with everything he had uttered.

"I know," he said, "that the present attitude of the majority of intellectual men in this country is a dangerous and impos-

sible one. Men cannot live in an atmosphere of criticism. What we want just now is a new gospel fitted for the times; we want a crusade of some sort—a powerful belief that will develope all sorts of sympathetic emotions and idealisms, instead of leaving one a prey to cold analysis. But we haven't got it; and those who have gone beyond this tidal flow of the last great religious flood, find themselves stranded on dry land, without a blade of grass or a drop of water in sight. Give me a gospel, and I'll take it with pleasure. Whether it be a new series of religious symbolisms, or a splendid system of ethics, demanding action, or even a belief in humanity as a supreme and beautiful power—anything that can convince me and compel me to admire, I will take. But I don't want to deal in old symbols, and old beliefs, and old theories, that fit me no more than the monkey-

jacket in which my mother sent me to school."

"You say you have got beyond us, and yet you acknowledge that you have been disappointed," urged Mr. Bexley. "Why not return to the Church, if only for personal satisfaction? You cannot be happy in your present position. You must be tormented by the most fearful doubts and anticipations. Are you not afflicted by moments of utter darkness, in which you long for the kindly hand of some spiritual authority to assist you and comfort you? In such perilous moments I believe I should go mad if I were to assure myself, for a single passing instant, that I was alone and unaided—that I had been teaching lies and superstitions all my life—that the world was a big machine, and we the accidental dust thrown out by its great chemic motions—that all the aspirations of our soul, and the

voice of conscience, and the standards of right at which we aim—were all delusions and mockeries. I would not have life on such terms. I should know that I only existed through the brute ignorance and superstition of my stronger-made fellow-men not permitting them to kill me and all such as I, and then to seize our means of living. I should look forward to the time when these superstitions should be cleared away, and the world, become a general scramble, handed over to those who had the longest claws and the fiercest teeth."

"Then," said Mr. Anerley, with a smile, "if the first glimpse of change is likely to derange your intellect in that fashion, and force you to so many absurd conclusions, you are better where you are. And about those moments of spiritual darkness, and torture, and longing of which you speak—I do not understand what they are. I am

never visited by them. I thank God I have a tolerable digestion."

"Digestion!" repeated the other, bitterly. "It all comes to that. Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow ye die; and the only resurrection you hope for is to breathe the sunlight again as a buttercup or a dandelion. What is it, may I ask, entices you to remain in the position you occupy—that of being an honest man, credited with constant generous actions, kindly to your inferiors, and what not? Why should you be moral at all? Why should you not, if it pleased you, go into any depths of dissipation and debauchery? There is nothing to restrain you."

"Pardon me, there is. If it were worth the trouble, I dare say I could convince you that my code of morality is not only more comprehensive and more strict than yours, but that it rests on more explicable and

more permanent foundations. But it is not worth the trouble to convince a single man at a time in which we are waiting for some great and general renovation."

So they went on, in the faint darkness, under the black branches and the grey sky. Mr. Bexley was not going to relinquish hope at the very outset; and he proceeded from point to point, adducing all the considerations which made it very much more advantageous to be orthodox than to be not orthodox. He might have persuaded a man who was hovering between the two states to go over to the bosom of the church; but his entreaties, and representations, and arguments had little effect upon a man who was separated from him by the great chasm of a dawning era.

"Perhaps I may lament my present negative, critical attitude," said Mr. Anerley,

quite frankly, "but I prefer it to yours. The successive tides of faith which pass over the world leave little circling eddies, and I have been caught in one of these; I cannot tell in what direction the next great movement will be — I only know I shall not see it."

The end of it was, just then, that Mr. Anerley begged of his neighbour and counsellor to go in-doors and have some supper with them. Mr. Bexley, a little disheartened, but still confident in his spiritual power to overcome, sometime or other, the strong resistance of the unconverted man's heart, agreed; and so they both went into the house and entered the dining-room, where the supper-table had just been prepared. Mrs. Anerley started up, with her face red as fire, when she saw her husband and the clergyman enter together; and this obvious departure from her usual self-possessed

and easy manner at once struck Mr. Anerley as being very peculiar. Nay, the poor little woman, feeling herself very guilty—harbouring a secret notion that she had tried to entrap her generous and open-minded husband—was more than ordinarily attentive and courteous to him. She was far more civil, and obliging, and formal towards him than towards her stranger-guest; and she never by any chance lifted her eyes to his.

Mr. Anerley saw it all, understood it all, and thought of it with an inward, pitying smile that was scarcely visible upon his lips. "There is a creature," he said to himself, "who might convert any man to anything, if she had the least logical chance on her side."

He saw also, or perhaps feared, that this embarrassment and restraint would only make her uncomfortable for the evening;

and so, in his kindly way, he called Dove to him. The young girl went over to him, and he put his arm round her waist, and said—

"Do you see that small woman over there, who looks so guilty? She is guilty; and that gentleman there, whom you have been accustomed to regard as the very pattern of all the virtues in the parish, is her accomplice."

Mrs. Anerley started again, and glanced in a nervous way towards Mr. Bexley. Even her desire for her husband's salvation was lost in the inward vow that never, never again would she seek for aid out of the domestic circle.

"Their secret having been found out, Dove, it remains to award them their punishment. In my royal clemency, however, I leave the sentence in your hands."

"What have they been doing, papa?"

"Ask them. Call upon the female prisoner to stand forward and say why sentence should not be pronounced against her."

"It is not a subject for merriment, Hubert," said his wife, blushing hotly, "and if I did ask Mr. Bexley to speak to you as a friend——"

"You hear, Dove, she confesses to the conspiracy, and also criminates her fellow-prisoner. If I had a black cowl, and some sherry at 12s. a dozen, I should sentence them to drink half a bottle each; having first bade them a final farewell."

"As it is, papa," said Dove, maliciously, "you had better give them some of that white Hungarian wine you are so fond of, and if they survive——"

"Mamma, order this girl to bed."

"That is what poor papa says whenever any one beats him in an argument or

says his wine isn't good," said Dove to Mr. Bexley.

But she went, nevertheless. For it was nearly ten o'clock, and although there was only a faint sickle of the moon now visible, that was still big enough to bear the thin thread of thought which so subtly connected her and her lover. She took out of her bosom a letter which she had received that morning, and she kissed it and held it in her hand, and said, looking up to the pale starlight and the clear white crescent—

"Moon, moon, will you tell him that I've got his letter, and that I've read it twenty times—a hundred times—over, and yet he doesn't say a word about coming home? Will you ask him when he is coming back to me—and tell him to come quick, quick, for the days are getting wearier and wearier? Couldn't you come down for a little minute,

and whisper to me, and tell me what he has been doing all this time, and what he is looking like, and what he is saying to you just now? Couldn't you give me a little glimpse of him, instead of keeping him to yourself, and staring down as if you didn't see anything at all? And you might as well tell him that I shall begin and hate Miss Brunel if he doesn't come back soon—and I'll play the 'Coulin' all day to myself when I'm alone, and be as miserable and wretched as ever I please. But here is a kiss for him anyway: and you wouldn't be so cruel as not to give him that!"

And Dove, having completed her orisons, went downstairs, with a smile on her sweet face; perhaps not thinking that the nightly staring at the moon, as the reader may perhaps suspect, had somewhat affected her brain. And she found Mr. Bexley more

brilliant and eloquent than ever in his exposition of certain spiritual experiences; and she was in such a mood of half-hysteric delight and happiness that she could have put her arm round Mr. Anerley's neck and begged him, for her sake, to be a little, just a little, more orthodox. As it was, he had promised to go inside the church next Sunday; and his wife was very happy.

CHAPTER II.

SCHÖN-ROHTRAUT.

DO you know the ballad of "Schön-Rohtraut"—the king's daughter who would neither spin nor sew, but who fished, and hunted, and rode on horseback through the woods, with her father's page for her only companion? Was there any wonder that the youth grew sad, and inwardly cried to himself,

"O dasz ich doch ein Königssohn wär,
Rohtraut, Schön-Rohtraut lieb' ich so sehr.
Schweig stille, mein Herze!"

One day they rested themselves under a great oak, and the merry Schön-Rohtraut

laughed aloud at her woe-stricken page and cried—

"Why do you look at me so longingly? If you have the heart to do it, come and kiss me, then!"

Whereupon the lad, with a terrible inward tremor, probably, went up and kissed Schön-Rohtraut's laughing lips. And they two rode quite silently home; but the page joyously said to himself, "I do not care now whether she were to be made Empress to-day; for all the leaves in the forest know that I have kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth."

There are many of us whose chief consolation it is to know that we have kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth. The middle-aged man, getting a trifle grey above the ears, sits by the fire of a winter evening and thinks of his own particular Schön-Rohtraut.

"I did not marry her; but I loved her in

the long bygone time, and that is enough for me. I had my 'liberal education.' If I had married her, perhaps I should not be loving her now; and all my tender memories of her, and of that pleasant time, would have disappeared. But now no one can dispossess me of the triumphant consciousness that it was my good fortune to have kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth."

There is much sympathy abroad upon this matter; and I think we men never get nearer to each other than when we talk, after our wives have gone upstairs to bed, of our lost loves.

This was partly what Will Anerley said to himself as the little party sate under the white awning of the *König Wilhelm*, and slowly steamed up the blue waters of the Rhine. Not without a tremor of conscience he said it; for he had a vague impression that he had been wantonly cruel to Dove.

In the first moments of remorse after awaking to a sense of his present position, he had said—

"There remains but one thing to be done. I shall at once return to England, and see Annie Brunel no more."

But a man approaching thirty has taught himself to believe that he has great fortitude, especially where his tenderer emotions are concerned; and his next reflection was—

"My sudden departure will only be a revelation to her, and happily she knows nothing about it. Besides, have I not sufficient strength of mind to spend a few days in the pleasant society of this young girl, without committing myself? The mischief is done, and I must suffer for my carelessness; but——"

But he would go on to Schönstein all the same, whither the two ladies had also

consented to go. He did not deceive himself when he submitted to his own conscience this theory. He knew there was no danger of his disturbing Miss Brunel's peace of mind, and he knew that Dove would have no further injustice done her. It was he who was to suffer. His thoughtlessness had permitted the growth of a hopeless passion: it would never be known to her who had inspired it, nor to her whom it had dispossessed. He only should carry about with him the scourge; and he was not without a hope that time and travel would for once accommodate themselves to an absurd superstition and cure him of an unfortunate love.

For the rest, he was almost glad that he had mentally kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth. The consciousness of this passionate and hopeless attachment was in itself a pure and elevated feeling—a maiden

delight which had no earthy element mixed with it. It was so different from the kindly, affectionate interest he took in Dove—so different from that familiar liking which made him think nothing of kissing the young girl in an easy, fraternal way. To think of kissing Miss Brunel! The page could only look wonderingly and longingly at his beautiful mistress, at her pretty lips and nut-white teeth, and say, "Schweig' stille, mein Herze!"

Quite assured of his own strength of will, he did not seek for a moment to withdraw himself from her, or raise any subtle barrier between them. In fact, he laughingly explained to himself that as compensation for the pain which he would afterwards have to suffer, he would now sup to the full the delicious enjoyment of her society. He would study as much as he chose the fine artistic head, the beautiful, warm, Italian colour of

her face, and her charming figure; and he would gaze his fill into the deep-grey eyes, which were always brightened up by an anticipatory kindliness when he approached. He remarked, however, that he had never seen them intensified by that passionate glow which he had observed on the stage—the emotional earnestness which belonged to what she called her "real life;" there was in the eyes merely a pleased satisfaction and good nature.

"When shall we get away from the Rhine?" she asked, as they were sailing past the Lorelei-berg.

"To-night," said the Count, "we shall stop at Mayence, and go on by rail to Freiburg to-morrow. Then we shall be away from the line of the tourists."

This was an extraordinary piece of generosity and concession on the part of Count Schönstein; for there was scarcely anything

he loved more dearly on earth than to linger about the well-known routes, and figure as a German Count before the Cockney-tourists who crowded the railway stations and *tables d'hôte.*

"I am so glad," said Miss Brunel. "I cannot bear to be among those people. I feel as if I were a parlour-maid sitting in a carriage with her master and mistress, and fancying that she was being stared at for her impertinence by every passer-by. Don't tell me it is absurd, Mr. Anerley; for I know it is absurd. But I cannot help feeling so all the same. When anybody stares at me, I say to myself, well, perhaps you've paid five shillings to stare at me in the theatre, and you think, of course, you have the same right here."

Will was very vexed to hear her speak so, partly because he knew that no reasoning would cure her of this cruel impression, and partly because he knew that she had

some ground for speaking as she did. Continually, along that insufferably Cockney-route, he had seen her stared at and ogled by lank youths from Oxford-street or Mincing-lane, who had got a holiday from counter or desk, and had hoisted a good deal of bunting to celebrate the occasion—bright green ties, striped collars, handkerchiefs marked with Adelina Patti's portrait, white sun hats with scarlet bands, yellow dust coats and dogskin gloves. In the intervals between their descents to the cabin, where they drank cognac in preference to "that beastly sour ock-wine," they would sit at a little distance, suck fiercely at their twopenny cigars, and stare at the young actress as they were accustomed to stare at the baboons in the Zoological Gardens, or at the Royal Family, or at their favourite barmaid. Then would follow confidential communications to En'ry or Arry that she

was very like 'Miss Trebelli,' and another head or tails for another "go" of brandy.

"If these creatures were to get to heaven," said Anerley to the Count, in a moment of jealous spleen, "they would ask their nearest way to the Philharmonic Music-hall."

It was partly this semi-Bohemian feeling which drew the young artiste towards Count Schönstein and Will Anerley, and allowed her to relish the society of people "out of the profession." Of the personal history of the Count she had got to know something; and while she tolerated his amusing self-sufficiency and admired his apparent good nature and even temper, she almost sympathised with him in his attitude towards society. It was the same people whom she had been taught to distrust, who were in league against the poor Count. They would not permit him to mix in their society, because, like herself, he was

an adventurer, a person whose position was not secured to him by an ancient royal grant. Will she looked upon in another fashion.

"You have been so much abroad and mixed with so many people, that you seem not to belong to England. There is nothing English about you—nothing of vanity, and self-importance, and suspicion of outsiders."

But against this praise, as against the whole tone of her mind on the subject, he had uttered many a serious protest.

"You blame us English with the impertinences of a few boys out for a holiday. You have heard stories of actors and actresses having received injuries from persons out of the profession; and you necessarily think there must be a mutual antagonism between the classes."

"I don't think anything about it," she used to say, "I only know what my impres-

sion is, however it has been taught me. And I know that there is no sympathy between me and the people whom I try to amuse; and that they despise me and my calling. I don't blame them for it; but how can you expect me to like them? I don't say they are narrow-minded, or prejudiced; but I know that an English lady would not sit down to dinner with an actress, that an English mother would think her son lost if he married an actress; and that a girl in good society who marries an actor is thought to have done something equivalent to running away with her father's footman."

These were the bitter precepts which the Marchioness of Knottingley had left with her daughter; and they had been instilled into the girl at a time when beliefs become part of our flesh and blood.

"There are ignorant and ill-educated

women who think so," said Will, calmly; "but you do an injustice to women of education, and good taste, and intelligent sympathies when you suppose that every one——"

"Let us take your own mother," said Annie Brunel, hastily. "Would she be anxious, supposing she knew me, to introduce me to the rest of her acquaintances? Would she ask me to visit her? Would she be willing that I should be a companion to that pretty little Dove?"

"I think I have answered all these questions before," said Will. "I tell you I can't answer for all the women of England; but for those of them whom I respect I can answer, and my mother is one of them. Has she not already allowed Dove to make your acquaintance?"

"Because I was a curiosity, and she was allowed to come and look at me in my cage,"

said the actress, with that cruel smile on her lips.

"Miss Brunel," said Will, simply and frankly, "you are exhibiting far more prejudice than you will find in the women you speak about. And I don't know whether you will forgive my saying that it seems a pity one of your years should already possess such suspicions and opinions of other people——"

Wherewith she looked him straight in the face, with a clear, searching glance of those big and honest eyes of hers, which would have made a less disinterested advocate falter.

"Are you telling me what you believe to be true?" she said.

"Could I have any object in deceiving you?"

"You believe that your mother, a carefully pious and correct lady, who has lived

all her life in the country, would dare to avow that she knew an actress?"

"She would be proud to avow it."

"Would she take me to church with her, and give me a seat in her pew, before all her neighbours?"

"Certainly she would."

"And what would they think?"

"Perhaps the parish clerk's wife," said Will, with a mental glance at Mrs. Bexley, "and the vet.'s wife, and a few women of similar extraction or education, might be shocked; but the educated and intelligent of them would only be envious of my mother. Wherever you go, you will find people who believe in witches, and the eternal damnation of unconverted niggers and the divine right of the nearest squire; but you don't suppose that we are all partial idiots? And even these people, if you went into the St. Mary-Kirby church, would only have to look at you——"

"You said something like that to me before," she replied, with the same nervous haste to exhibit every objection—was it that she the more wished them to be explained away?—"and I told you I did not think much of the charity that was only extended to me personally because my face was not old and haggard. Suppose that I were old, and painted, and——"

"But if you were old, you would not be painted."

"I might."

"In that case, all the women would have some ground to be suspicious of you; and many of them would be angry because you were allowed a luxury denied them by their husbands. Really, Miss Brunel, you do the 'outsiders' an injustice," he added, warming to his work. "Stupid people and uneducated people do not care for nice discriminations. They have always decided

opinions. They like to have clear lines of thought and positive decisions. They ticket things off, and stick to their classifications through thick and thin, as if they were infallible. But you do wrong to care for the opinion of the stupid and uneducated."

"I should like to believe you; but how can I? If, as you say, we have fallen so low as even to earn the contempt of the stupid——"

"My darling," he said, and then he stopped as if a bullet had gone through him, "I—I beg your pardon; but I really fancied for the moment I was quarrelling with some of Dove's nonsense——"

She smiled in such an easy way at the mistake, however, that he saw she put no importance upon it.

"I was going to say—how could stupid people exist if they did not despise their superiors in wit, and intellect, and artistic

perception? There is a man at my club, for instance, who is intellectually, as he is physically, a head and shoulders taller than any of his brother members. What reputation has he? Simply, that of being 'an amusing young fellow, but—but very shallow, don't you know.' The empty-headed idiots of the smoking-room sit and laugh at his keen humour, and delicate irony, and witty stories; and rather patronize and pity him in that he is weak enough to be amusing. A dull man always finds his refuge in calling a man of brighter parts than himself 'shallow.' You should see this friend of mine when he goes down into the country to see his relations; how he is looked upon at the dinner-table as being only fit to make the women smile; and how some simpering fool of a squire, with nothing more brilliant in his library than a pair of hunting-boots, will grin compassionately to some other

thick-headed farmer, as though it were a ludicrous thing to see a man make himself so like a woman in being witty and entertaining."

"And you think the women in these country-houses more intelligent and amusing than the men?"

"God help country-houses when the women are taken out of them!"

"What a large portion of my life have I wasted over this abominable Bradshaw," said Count Schönstein, coming up at that moment, and their conversation was for the present stopped.

But Will now recognised more firmly than ever the invisible barrier that was placed between her and the people among whom his life had been cast; and, perhaps, for Dove's sake, he was a little glad that he could never look upon this too charming young actress but as the inhabitant of another

world. And sometimes, too, he involuntarily echoed Dove's exclamation, "You are too beautiful to be an actress!"

When, after a pleasant little supper-party in the Mayence hotel at which they stopped, they parted for the night, Will congratulated himself on the resolution he had taken in the morning. It had been such a pleasant day; and who was the worse for it? He was sick at heart when he thought the time would come in which he could no more enjoy the keen pleasure of sitting near this tender creature, of watching her pretty ways, and listening to her voice. The love he felt for her seemed to give him a right of property in her, and he thought of her going for ever away from him as an irreparable and painful loss. There was a quick, anxious throbbing at his heart as he attempted to picture that last interview; for he had resolved that after their return to

England, he would not permit himself to see her again. He thought of her going away from him without once knowing of that subtle personal link which seemed to unite them in a secret friendship. She would be quite unconscious of the pain of that parting; she might even think that he had yielded to the prejudices of which she had spoken, and had become ashamed of her friendship.

"That, too, must be borne," he said, with a sigh. "I cannot explain why I should cease to see her; and yet we must never meet again after we return to England. If it were not for Dove, I should look out for some appointment abroad, and so get an excuse; for it is hard to think that I must wound the self-respect of so gentle a creature by appearing to refuse her proffered friendship without a cause."

Then he sate down and wrote a long letter to Dove; and for the first time he felt a

great constraint upon him in so doing. He was so anxious, too, that she should not notice the constraint, that he wrote in a more than usually affectionate strain; and strove to impress her with the necessity of their being married very soon.

"Once married," he said to himself, "I shall soon forget this unhappy business. In any case, we must all suffer more or less; and it is entirely owing to my carelessness in enjoying Miss Brunel's society without looking at what it might lead to. But how should a man of my years have anticipated such a thing? Have I not been intimate with as pretty and as accomplished women in all parts of the world, without ever dreaming of falling in love with them?"

But no, there was no woman so pretty and charming as *this* one, he reflected. No one at all. And so, counting up in his mind, like a miser counting his guineas, one by one, the

few days he would yet have to spend in the torturing delight of being near to her, he got him to bed, and did *not* dream of St. Mary-Kirby.

The next day they reached Freiburg, and here the Count had a carriage awaiting them, with a couple of swarthy Schwarzwalders in his somewhat ostentatious livery.

"Now we are getting home," he said, with a bland laugh to Mrs. Christmas; "and you must have a very long rest after so much travelling. We shall see what the air of Schönstein will do for you, and a little of the Schönstein wine—eh, eh?"

Their entrance to the Black Forest was inauspicious. It was towards the afternoon before they left Freiburg; and the air was oppressively hot and sultry. Just as they were approaching the Höllenthal — the Valley of Hell—a strange noise attracted Will's attention; and, looking over the back

of the open carriage, he saw behind them a great red cloud, that entirely shut out the landscape. Two minutes afterwards a sudden gust of wind smote them with the violence of a tornado; they were enveloped in a dense lurid pall of sand; and before they could cover over the carriage great drops of rain began to fall. Then the far-off rumbling of thunder, and an occasional gleam of reflected lightning, told what was coming.

The Count looked much alarmed.

"The Höllenthal is a fearful place," said he, to the ladies: "overhanging rocks, dark as pitch, precipices, you know—and—and hadn't we better return to Freiburg? That is, if you think you will be afraid. For myself, I'd rather go on to-night, and save a day."

"Don't think of turning on our account," said Annie Brunel. "Mrs. Christmas and

I have been together in a good many storms."

So they went on, and entered that gloomy gorge, which is here the gateway into the Black Forest. They had just got themselves closed in by the mighty masses of rock, when the storm thoroughly broke over their head. It was now quite dark, and the thin white shafts of lightning shot down through the ravine, lighting up the fantastic and rugged sides of the pass with a sudden sharpness. Then the thunder crackled overhead, and was re-echoed in hollow rumbles, as if they were in a cavern with huge waves beating outside; and the rain fell in torrents, hissing on the road, and swelling the rapid stream that foamed and dashed down its rocky channel by their side. Every flash whitened the four faces inside the carriage with a spectral glare; and sometimes they got a passing glance

down the precipice, by the side of which the road wound, or up among the overhanging blocks and crags of the mountains.

Mrs. Christmas had been in many a thunder-storm, but never in the Höllenthal; and the little woman was terrified out of her life. At every rattling report of the thunder she squeezed Miss Brunel's hand the more tightly, and muttered another sentence of an incoherent prayer.

"Unless you want to kill your horses, Count," said Will, "you'll stop at the first inn we come to; that is about a mile further on. I can tell by the sound of the wheels that the horses are dragging them through the mud and ruts by main force; and up this steep ascent that wont last long."

"Think of poor Mary and Hermann," said Annie Brunel. "Where must they be?"

"I'll answer for Hermann coming on to-

night if he's alive," said the Count. "And I hope that he and the luggage and Mary wont be found in the morning down in that tremendous hole where the stream is. Bless my life, did any mortal ever see such a place, and such a night! What a flash that was!"

It was about midnight when they reached the Stern inn; and very much astonished were the simple people, when they were woke up, to find that a party of visitors had ventured to come through the Hell Valley on such a night.

"And the hired carriage from Freiburg, Herr Graf," said the chief domestic of the little hostelry; "it wont come up the valley before the morning."

"What does the fool say?" the Count inquired of Will.

"He says that the trap with the luggage wont come up to-night."

"Bah!" said the Count, grandly. "Sie wissen nicht dasz mein Förster kommt; und er kommt durch zwanzig — durch zwanzig — zwanzig — damme, get some supper, and mind your own business."

"Yes, eef you please, my lord," said the man, who knew a little English.

The Count was right. Hermann did turn up, and Mary, and the luggage. But the hired vehicle had been a badly-fitting affair, and the rain had got in so copiously that Mary was discovered sitting with Hermann's coat wrapped round her, while the tall keeper had submitted to be drenched with the inevitable good humour of six-feet-two. Some of the luggage also was wet; but it was carried into the great warm kitchen, and turned out and examined.

At supper, the Count, who was inclined to be merry, drank a good quantity of Affenthaler, and congratulated Mrs. Christmas on

her heroic fortitude. Annie Brunel was quiet and pleasant as usual—a trifle grave, perhaps, after that passage through the Höllenthal. Will was at once so happy and so miserable—so glad to be sitting near the young Italian-looking girl, so haunted by the dread of having to separate from her in a short week or two—that he almost wished the storm had hurled the vehicle down into the bed of the stream, and that there he and Schön-Röhtraut might have been found dead together in the grey morning.

CHAPTER III.

SCHÖNSTEIN.

"WELCOME to Schönstein!" cried the Count, gaily, as a turn in the road brought them in sight of a little hamlet, a small church, and beyond these—somewhat back from the village—an immense white house with green sun-shades over the windows.

"Friend Anerley," said the Count to himself, "if you ever had a thought of paying your addresses to the lady opposite you, your case is rather hopeless *now!*"

Annie Brunel looked forward through the ruddy mist that the sunset was pouring over the picture before them, and thought

that it was very beautiful indeed. She paid little attention to the gaunt white house. But this little village, set in a clearing of the great forest — its brown wooden houses, with their heavy projecting eaves and numerous windows; the small white church, with a large sun-dial painted in black on the gable; the long, sloping hill behind, covered, away even to the horizon, with the black-green pines of the Schwarzwald—all these things, steeped in the crimson glow of the western light, were indeed most charming and picturesque.

"Why do they project the roofs so much?" she said, looking especially at the inn of the little hamlet they were approaching. "I thought these splendid old houses only existed in Swiss lithographs."

"For the snow," said the Count, grandly, as if the intensity of the Black Forest winters belonged to him. "You should see

a regular snow-storm in this country, with half the houses buried, the mail-coaches turned into sledges—why, every man who keeps a carriage here must keep it in duplicate—a wheel-carriage for the summer, a sledge for the winter."

With which they drove through the village. Hans Halm, the sturdy innkeeper, was at the door of that palace in brown wood which he called his house; and to Hermann's hurried—"Wie geht's? Wie geht's, Halm?" he returned a joyous "danke schön, Hermann."

"But where is Grete?" said Hermann, in a bewildered way, to the English Mary who sate beside him in the second carriage. "She not here? She know I come; she is not at the door of the inn——"

"Who is Grete?" said Mary, who had made great friends with the big keeper in England.

"Why, Grete is—you know, Grete."

At that moment Margarethe Halm was in the courtyard of the Count's house, whither she had stolen away from her father's house, with her heart beating, and her ears listening for the sound of the carriage wheels. A young, swarthy, handsome girl, with an innocent, dumb, animal-like fondness and honesty in her big, soft, black eyes, she stood there in her very best clothes —her Sunday head-dress of black velvet and gold beads; her short petticoats and dress; her elaborately embroidered boddice; her puffed white sleeves, coming down to the elbow, and there exposing her round, fat, sunburned arms. She it was with whom Hermann had sung, on the night before he left for England, the old ballad in which the wanderer bids farewell to his native vale; and ever since, when she heard the pitiful words—

"Musz aus dem Thal jezt scheiden,
Wo alles Lust und Klang;
Das ist mein herbstes Leiden
Mein letzter Gang.
Dich, mein stilles Thal, grüsz ich tausend Mal!
Das ist mein herbstes Leiden,
Mein letzter Gang!"

the big black eyes were wont to overflow, and her round brown cheeks grew wet with tears. She was always very silent, this Grete Halm, and you might have thought her dull; but she was so extraordinarily sensitive to emotional impressions, and there was such a mute, appealing look in her eyes for kindness and affection, that half the young men in the neighbourhood would have given their ears to be permitted to walk about with Grete, and go to church with her, and sing with her in the evening. There was the young schoolmaster, for example—everybody knew how he came to have that ugly mark on his nose the last time he came home from Göttingen, to un-

dertake the tuition of his neighbours' children. It was at a beer-drinking bout, and a few got tipsy; and one especially, Friedrich Schefer, disliking young Gersbach, came round to him, and said—

"I see you have Margarethe Halm written on one of your books. If that is the name of your sweetheart, my friend Seidl says she is a rogue, and not to be trusted."

"I challenge you," says Gersbach, calmly, but blinking fiercely through his spectacles.

"Further, muthiger Herr Gersbach, my friend Seidl says, your Margarethe Halm has half-a-dozen sweethearts, and that you give her money to buy presents for them."

"You are a liar, Friedrich Schefer!" shouts Gersbach, starting to his feet; "and I challenge you, '*ohne, ohne.*' "*

* The extended phrase is "Ich fordere Ihnen auf, *ohne Mützen, ohne Secundanten*"—"I challenge you, *without either*

So the next morning the meeting took place; and the unfortunate Gersbach, who had had little practice, and was slow of eye, suddenly received a blow which divided the under part of his nose from the upper. The wound was sewn up again on the spot; but when Gersbach came home he looked a hideous spectacle, and though he never spoke of it, it leaked out that the wound had been got in fighting about Margarethe Halm. Gersbach was a great friend of Hans Halm's, and spent every evening in the inn chatting with the keepers, or reading Greek, and drinking white wine and water; but Grete showed him no particular favour, and he seemed rather sad.

"Ach, Gott," said Margarethe to herself,

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masks or seconds." Such a challenge being given (and it is only given in cases of extreme provocation), the duellists fight without cessation until one of them is put *hors de combat.*

as she stood in the stone courtyard; "if they should not come—and if my father should see me——"

The next moment she caught sight of the two carriages coming along through the village; and her heart waxed a little faint as she saw that Hermann was sitting with a rosy young English girl by his side.

"He never wrote to me anything about her," she thought, in those scrawled letters which always ended '*Getchen mir, deuke ran; und mit herzlichsten Grüssen,*' &c. &c.

It seemed part of the tall head-forester's pride that he would not permit himself to show any joyful surprise on finding that Grete was in the courtyard. On the contrary, with a curt, "'*n Abend, Grete,*" he passed her, and busied himself in seeing that the Count and his guests were being properly attended to by the servants, and that the luggage was being straightway carried in.

Margarethe Halm, with her heart beating worse than ever, came timidly forward, then hung about a little, and at last ventured to say, with a little quivering of the mouth—

"Thou hast never even shaken hands with me, Hermann."

"But thou seest that I am busy, Grete, and—*Donnerwetter*, idiot, look what you do with the lady's box!—and thou shouldst not have come at such a time, when the Herr Graf and his visitors have just arrived, and expect——"

He proceeded to give some more orders; for the head-forester was an important man in Schönstein, and looked upon the Count's domestics as he looked upon his own keepers. But happening to turn, he caught a glimpse of what suddenly smote down his gruff pride—Margarethe Halm was standing by, with her soft black eyes brimming over with tears. Of course his stalwart arms

were round her shoulders in a moment, and he was talking pettingly and caressingly to her, as if she were an infant, with ever so many *du's*, and *klein's*, and *chen's*.

The Count's big mansion, though it looked like a whitewashed cotton-factory outside, was inside very prettily furnished; and the long, low-roofed rooms, with their polished wooden floors and gaily-decorated walls, were very cool and pleasant. There was little garden about the house; the ground behind was laid out in formal walks between avenues of acacias and limes; there was a little pond with a plaster boy in the centre, who spouted a thin jet of water through a pipe; and there was, at the further end of the trees, an artificial ruin, which the previous proprietor had failed to complete when the Count took possession of the place.

"How lovely the village looks in that red

light!" said Anne Brunel, as they all went out on the balcony of the room in which dinner had been laid for them.

"But the glory of Schönstein," said the Count, slapping Will on the shoulder—"I say, the glory of Schönstein, my boy, lies in those miles and miles of trees—the deer, my lad, the deer! Ah, Miss Brunel, when I see you take a gun upon your shoulder, and march into the forest with us—like Diana, you know——"

He looked at her with the admiring smile of an elderly Adonis. Had he not the right, now that she had seen his splendour and his wealth? Could he doubt any longer about his chance of winning that white little hand?

"You are too kind, Count," she said, laughingly. "Lady Jane will tell you that the very name of Diana has been always hateful to me."

"It's Diana Vernon she means," said Mrs. Christmas, with a pretty little laugh; "that she used to play before she became a grand lady. And play it she did, Count, take my word for it, as well as ever you could think of; and as for me, I never *could* understand how she so hated the part, which is a very good part for a young miss that can sing. I declare the dialogue is quite beautiful."

Here she gave, with great feeling and correct, impassioned emphasis, some passages in which the Diana and Francis of that ridiculous drama talk bombastic sentiment to each other, causing Miss Brunel to laugh until the tears ran down her cheeks.

"You may laugh as you like, Miss Annie, but it's a beautiful piece; and how many years is it since you played it for my benefit?"

"You're making me quite old, Lady Jane," protested the young actress.

"People have only to look at you, my dear," continued the bright little old woman, "and they wont make a mistake. That was the very last time I went on the stage, Count; and do you know what I played?—why, 'Miami' in the 'Green Bushes.' And Miss Annie, here, just to please me, consented to play 'Nelly O'Neil,' and will you believe me, Mr. Anerley, I stood in the wings and cried—me, an old woman, who had heard it all a thousand times—when she began to sing the 'Green Bushes.' Have you heard it, Count—don't you know the words of it?

"'As I was a-walking one morning in May,
To hear the birds singing, and see lambkins play,
I espied a young damsel, so sweetly sung she,
Down by the Green Bushes, where she chanced to meet me.'

There was Polly Hastings—she played

'Geraldine' then—came to me after that last night, and said, solemnly, that she would give herself over to the devil if he would only make her able to sing the ballad as Miss Annie sung it that night. The people in the pit——."

"Mrs. Christmas will go on romancing all the evening, Mr. Anerley, if you don't stop her," said Miss Brunel.

"And poor Tom Mulloney—he played 'Wild Murtogh' for me—do you remember, Miss Annie, that morning at rehearsal when they came and told him that his wife and the little boy were drowned? He didn't speak a word—not a word; he only shook a little, and was like to fall; then he walked out, and he was never on the boards of a theatre again. He took to drinking as if he was mad; and he was put in an asylum at last; and they say he used to sing all his old songs at the amateur concerts in the

place, you know, better nor ever he had sung them in the theatre—that was 'The Dance on the Flure,' and 'The Jug o' Punch,' and 'Savourneen Deelish,' and 'The Coulin'——"

"The Coulin!" said Will, with a sort of chill at the heart; he had forgotten all about Dove, and St. Mary-Kirby; and the remembrance of them, at that moment, seemed to reproach him somehow.

"Do you know the 'Coulin'?" asked Miss Brunel, wondering at his sudden gravity.

"Yes," said he, with an affectation of carelessness. "It is one of Dove's favourite airs. But she wont accept the modern words as representing the song; she will have it that the melody describes the parting of two friends——"

"Come, then," said the Count, briskly, "dinner is ready. Miss Brunel, you shall play us the—the what, did you say?—to-

morrow, after the man has come from Donaueschingen to tune the piano. Not a bad piano, either, as you'll see; and now I don't grudge having bought it along with the rest of the furniture, when I find that *you* will charm us with an occasional song. Four hundred florins, I think it was; but I don't know."

As they retired into the long dining-saloon, where a sufficiently good dinner was placed on the table, Hermann came out into the courtyard, surrounded by a lot of yelping little beagles, with short, stumpy legs, long ears, long noses, and sagacious eyes. Further, there was a huge brown mastiff, with long, lithe limbs, and tremendous jaws, at sight of which Grete shrank back, for the brute was the terror of the village.

"Go down, then, thou stupid dog, thou worthless fellow! seest thou not the young

lady is afraid? Ah, du guter Hund, du Rudolph, and so thou knowest me again? Come along, Grete, he wont touch you; and we'll go to see your father."

"You won't tell him I was waiting for you, Hermann?" said the girl, shyly.

Hans Halm stood at the door of his *châlet*-looking hostelry, in a thin white coat and a broad straw hat, with a complacent, benevolent smile on his stout visage and shrewd blue eyes. Sometimes he looked up and down the road, wondering what had become of Grete, who, Frau Halm being dead, had taken her mother's place in the management of the inn. Perhaps Hans suspected where his tender-hearted, black-eyed daughter had gone; at least, he was in nowise surprised to see her coming back with Hermann, Rudolph joyously barking by their side. The two men shook hands heartily, and kissed each other; for had they

not, some years before, pledged themselves solemnly to call each other "du" and sworn eternal friendship, and drank a prodigious quantity of Affenthaler over that ceremony?

"Gretchen, get you indoors; the house is quite full, and you can't expect your grandmother to do everything."

Hermann looked into the passage. On the pegs along the wall were hung a number of guns—nearly all of them double-barrelled breech-loaders; with white barrels, and broad green straps for the slinging of them over the shoulder.

"My men are within, *nicht wahr?*" he said.

"Listen, and you will hear," said Hans Halm.

From the door by which Grete had disappeared, there issued a faint murmur of voices and a strong odour of tobacco-smoke. Hermann went forward and opened this

door, meeting there a picture with which he was quite familiar, but which it is quite impossible to describe. The chief room of the inn, monopolising all the ground-floor, and lighted by ten or twelve small windows, was almost filled with a cloud of pale-blue smoke, in which picturesque groups of men were seen seated round the long, narrow tables. Brown-faced, bearded men, they wore the foresters' dress of green and grey, with a tall beaver hat in which were stuck some capercailzie feathers, with a large cartridge-pouch of roe-skin slung over their shoulder by a green strap, with a horn slung round their neck by means of a twisted green cord with tattered tassels, and with a long killing-knife lying on the table before them, with which they from time to time cut a lump off the brown loaf. All round the low-roofed room, forming a sort of cornice, ran a row of deer's horns, tastefully mounted,

each marked with the date on which the animal had been shot. These were for the most part the product of Hans Halm's personal skill; though the finest pair had been presented to him by Hermann. Besides the under-keepers, there were one or two villagers, and in a corner sat young Gersbach, his spectacles firmly fixed on the book before him, except when Margarethe Halm happened to pass before him, as she brought in fresh chopins of white wine to the swarthy, sinewy, picturesque foresters.

Of course Hermann's entrance was the signal for a general uproar, all the keepers starting from the benches and crowding round him to bid him welcome. At last he managed to get clear of them, and then he sat down on one of the benches.

"Listen, friends!" he said, in a loud voice, bringing down his hand with a bang on the table.

There was instant silence.

"The Herr Graf and his friend go shooting to-morrow morning. Every man will be here by four o'clock—four o'clock, do you understand? In placing the guns, you will take care that the Herr Graf, and the other Engländer, have the *Haupt-platz** alternately. Four o'clock, every one of you, remember. And now, in God's name, Hans Halm, let us have some of your white wine, that I haven't tasted for many a day!"

There was a new life in the big forester, now that he had sniffed the resinous odour of his native woods and was once more among his own people. He languished in the dull solitude of Kent; here he knew his business, he was respected of men, and

* The Haupt-platz is the point at which the deer are most likely to break cover, and therefore the best position for the sportsman. There are generally one or two of those good places, which are invariably given, as a compliment, to strangers.

he speedily showed that there was none of the old swing and vigour gone out of him.

He had scarcely spoken of the wine, when Grete came up with it in a tall white measure, a modest and pleased smile on her face.

"She does not smile like that to the young Mr. Schoolmaster," whispered one keeper to another. "Our Gretchen has her favourites."

"God give her courage if she marries Hermann," said the other. "He will drive her as we drive the roe."

"Nonsense! Hermann Löwe is an infant with women. You should see how his sister-in-law in Donaueschingen manages him."

At this moment the schoolmaster, whom nobody had noticed, came forward and said to his rival—

"How do you find yourself, Hermann Löwe?"

"Ah, right well, Herr Schulmeister," replied the other, giving him a hearty grasp of the hand. "And I'll tell you what I've got for you in my box. I looked for all the beetles, and creeping things, and butterflies I could in England, and all the strange ones I have brought for you, with a fine big pin run through their body."

"You are very kind, Hermann Löwe."

"No, I'm not. You did a good turn to my sister-in-law's child when he was nearly dead with eating those berries—that's all. And do you still read as much, and gather beetles yourself? Now, look here—I must have all the lads in the neighbourhood to drive for me in the morning, and they'll have to work hard, for the Herr Graf is not a patient man, and he gets angry if there are not plenty of bucks; and so, if the boys

are too tired to go to the evening school—you understand?"

Gersbach nodded.

"And the Herr Graf will be pleased if you come with us yourself, Gersbach," added Hermann.

Later in the evening the Count's party came round to visit the inn. By this time Hermann had gone; but there still remained a few of the keepers, who, on seeing the Count, politely rose from their seats.

"Nein," said the Count, in a lordly way, "eh—ah—sitzen sie, gute freundin—eh, freunde—und wie sind Sie, Herr Halm und sein Tochter?"

Halm, with admirable gravity, replied to the Count as if his highness's manner and grammar had quite impressed the poor innkeeper.

"Very well indeed, Herr Graf; and Grete, she will be here this moment. I under-

stand you are going to shoot to-morrow morning, Herr Graf; I hope you will have much sport."

"He says the deer are very plentiful," observed the Count, oracularly, to Annie Brunel. "So you really must come with us to-morrow and see our luck."

"Are these roe-deer's horns?" the young lady asked. "Pray ask him how he came to have so many. Did he shoot them all himself?"

The Count turned, with rather an uncomfortable expression, towards the innkeeper, and said (in German)—

"The lady loves to know if—you have—everything shot."

Halm looked aghast. Was the Count going to impeach him with having thinned the neighbouring woods during the owner's absence? He immediately broke into a long explanation and description of all the

drives they had had that season, and told how the deer were so plentiful that the people were complaining bitterly of having their fields and gardens eaten up, and so forth, and so forth. But the embarrassment of the Count's face only deepened, and still further deepened, until, in a querulous tone, he cried out—

"I say, Anerley, I think you'd better come and listen to what he says about the sport you're likely to get to-morrow, rather than waste time in showing Mrs. Christmas things she doesn't care about!"—this with a hot face and an excited air.

"If you listen, isn't that enough?" said Anerley.

"But, damme, I can't understand a word he says—he talks like an engine, and all in that horrid *patois*——Herr Halm, I comprehend; but, do you know, the lady loves to drink your white wine." (This in German).

"Some white wine, Herr Graf?"

"Yes. Not many. We wish to drink all—four glasses, you understand."

"It is so difficult," continued the Count, addressing Miss Brunel, "to get these people to understand German, if you don't speak their barbarous form of it. However, I have told him we all wished to taste the white wine they drink here—not a bad wine, and remarkably cheap."

"Let me introduce you, Miss Brunel," said Will, "to Miss Grete Halm, who says she speaks French, and will be delighted to escort you to-morrow at any time you may wish to join us. Grete says she once shot a deer herself; but I suspect somebody else pulled the trigger while she held the gun."

Gretchen came forward with a warm blush on her brown cheek; and then it was arranged (she speaking French fluently

enough, but with a Schwarzwald accent) that she and Annie Brunel would seek out the shooting party towards the forenoon of the following day.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUNT DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF.

IN the dusk of the early morning the keepers, drivers, and dogs had assembled in the large room of Hans Halm's inn. Hermann was there too, with the great-jawed Rudolph; and Margarethe, with a shadowy reminiscence of recent dreams in her soft black eyes, stood quietly on one side, or brought some beer to this or that gruff forester, who had perhaps walked a dozen miles that morning to the place of rendezvous. The dogs lay under the chairs, the guns and deer-skin pouches of the men were on the table before them, by the side

of their tall, feathered beavers; and if the whole scene did not look as if it had been cut out of an opera, it was because the picturesque trappings of the keepers had been sobered in colour by the rain and sun of many years, and because there dwelt over the party an austere silence. The excitement of the day had not commenced.

When the Count and Will arrived at the place of meeting, a faint flush of rose-colour was beginning to steal along the dark violet of the dawn; and as the whole party set out, in straggling twos and threes along the grey road, daylight began to show itself over the fields and the mist-covered woods.

Hermann, who led the way, was accompanied by a little old man with a prodigious black moustache, twinkling eyes, and comical gravity of face, who was captain over the drivers, and named Spiegelmann. The venerable Spiegelmann, with his tall hat, and

slung horn, was a man of importance; and he had already, with much seriousness, pronounced his opinion on the direction of the wind, and on the necessity for beginning the driving some considerable distance further on.

Then came Will Anerley, who had made friends with the young schoolmaster, Gersbach, and was very anxious to know how life was to be made tolerable if one lived at Schönstein all the year round. Indeed, Anerley's having travelled so much, and among so many different people, combined with a certain natural breadth of sympathy, gave him a peculiar interest in trying to imagine himself in the position of almost every man whom he met. How did those men regard the rest of the world? What had they to look forward to? What was their immediate aim—their immediate pleasure? Anerley would take as much interest

in the affairs of an applewoman, and talk as gravely and freely to her about them, as he would in the more ambitious projects of an artist or a man of letters. The gratifying of this merely intellectual curiosity was a constant habit and source of satisfaction to him; and while it offended some people by the frankness of speech, and charmed others by the immediate generosity and self-denial which were its natural results, it promised to leave him, sooner or later, in the attitude of negative criticism and social isolation which his father exhibited. Fortunately he had inherited from his mother a certain warmth of heart and impulse which corrected his transmitted tendency to theorize: it was this side of his temperament which had brought upon him his present misfortune, while he had been engaged, out of pure curiosity, in studying Annie Brunel's character and endeavouring to enter into

her views of the people and things around her. In fact, the pursuit of which I speak, though extremely enticing and pleasant, should never be attempted by an unmarried man who has not passed his fortieth year.

In the present case the young Herr Schulmeister took an instant liking for the grave, cheerful, plain-spoken man beside him, who seemed to concern himself about other people, and was so ready with excuses for them.

"I should not take you to be an Englishman," said Gersbach.

"Why?"

"You have none of the English character. Count Schönstein is an Englishman—a typical Englishman—conceited, bigoted in his own opinions, generous when it is permitted to him to be ostentatious, dull and stupid, and jealous of people who are not so——"

"My friend," said Will, "why didn't you leave your dolls behind you in the nursery? Or is this typical Englishman one of your university puppets? You know there is no such thing as a typical Englishman, or typical Frenchman, or typical German; and I have almost come to believe that there is no such thing as national character. The most reckless prodigals I have met have been Scotchmen; the keenest business-men I have met have been Irishmen; the dullest and most melancholy, Frenchmen——"

"And the Germans?" asked Gersbach, with a laugh.

"The Germans are like anybody else, so far as disposition goes, although they happen to be educationally and intellectually a little ahead of other nations. And as for the poor Graf, I don't think you, for example, would make half as good a man as he is if you were in his position."

"Perhaps not; but why?"

"I can't exactly explain it to you in German; but doctrinairism is not the first requisite in a landlord; and if you were the Graf, you would be for coercing the people under you and about you, into being logical, and you would withdraw yourself from people who opposed you, and you would gradually weaken your influence and destroy your chances of doing good. Why are our Tory country gentlemen always better liked by the people than the Radical proprietors? Why are Tories, as a rule, pleasanter companions than Radicals? I am a Radical; but I always prefer dining with a Tory."

"Is the Count a Tory?" asked the Schulmeister.

"Yes. Men who have been in business and earned, or gained, a lot of money, almost invariably become fierce Tories. It is their

first passport to respectability; and there is no step one can take so cheaply as that of changing one's political theories."

"What a singular social life you have in England!" cried Gersbach, blinking with a curious sort of humour behind his big spectacles. "There is the demi-monde, for example. Why you talk of that, and your writers speak of it, as if there was an acknowledged rivalry openly carried on between the members of it and your married women."

"But our married women," said Will, "are going to form a trades-union among themselves in order to crush that institution."

At which Franz Gersbach looked puzzled: these English were capable of trying any mad expedient; and somehow their devices always worked well, except in such matters as popular education, military efficiency, music, scholarship, and so forth. As for a

trades-union of any kind, it was sure to flourish in England.

They had now reached the edge of the forest, and here Hermann called the party around him, and gave his orders in a loud, peremptory tone, which had the effect of considerably frightening his master; the Count hoped that he would do nothing inaccurate.

"You, Herr Schulmeister, will accompany the drivers, and Spiegelmann will give you one of the return-posts. Falz, you will go down to the new-cut road, Greef on your right, Bagel further along. Spiegelmann will sound his horn when you are all posted, and the second horn when the drive commences. Forward, then, in God's name, all of us!"

And away trooped the lads under the surveillance of the venerable Spiegelmann, who had a couple of brace of leashed

beagles pulling and straining and whining to get free into the brushwood. Hermann, Will, and the Count at once dived into the twilight of the tall pines, that almost shut out the red flames of the morning over their peaks. The soft, succulent yellow moss was heavy with dew, and so were the ferns and the stoneberry bushes. A dense carpet of this low brushwood deadened the sound of their progress; and they advanced, silent as phantoms, into the dim recesses of the wood. Here and there occurred an opening or clearance, with a few felled trees lying about; then they struggled through a wilderness of younger fir and oak, and finally came into a tract of the forest where nothing was to be seen as far as the eye could reach but innumerable tall trunks, coated with the yellow and grey lichens of many years, branchless almost to their summit, and rising from a level plain of

damp green moss. There was not even the sound of a bird, or of a falling leaf, to break the intense silence of the place; nor was there the shadow of any living thing to be seen down those long, narrow avenues between the closely-growing stems of the trees.

"Count Schönstein," said Will, in a whisper, as they drew near the Hauptplatz, "what gun is that you have with you?"

"My central-fire."

"Carries far?"

"I should think so. Shoots hard and close as a rifle."

"Will it kill at sixty yards?"

"It might."

"Hermann," said Will, turning to the head keeper, "I insist on being posted eighty yards distant from the Count."

"You think that is a joke," said the Count, peevishly.

"I don't think it a joke at all," said Will. "Breech-loaders have a wonderful faculty for going off when nobody expects them; and though you may explain the thing satisfactorily afterwards, that wont remove a few buck-shot out of your leg."

"I am not in the habit of letting my gun go off accidentally," said the Count, grandly. "Indeed, I flatter myself that few men better understand the use of——"

"The *Haupt-platz*, Herr," said Hermann, unceremoniously breaking in upon his master. "The Herr Graf will be stationed further down this path; you must not shoot in that direction. You may shoot in front as the deer comes to you, or after them when they have passed; not along this line, only."

"Danke schön, Hermann, and tell the same thing to the Count."

He now found himself opposite a tall tree,

which had a cross in red paint traced upon the trunk. The Count and Hermann passed on, and when the three were posted, each held out his arm and signalled that he understood his immediate neighbour's position, and would remember it.

Scarcely had they done so when a long and loud *tantara!* from Spiegelmann's horn told them that the drivers were ready. A faint echo now came from the other side of the strip of forest, showing that there the keepers were posted; and finally a return-blast from Hermann's horn proclaimed that all were waiting.

Once more a brilliant trill from Spiegelmann; this time an audacious and elaborate effort, full of noisy anticipation, came through the wood; and then were heard the faint and far-off sounds of yelping dogs, and shouting men, and sticks being beaten against the stumps of the trees. The drive

had commenced. Count Schönstein began to tremble; his heart went faster and faster, as his excited brain peopled all the dim vistas of the trees with living forms. He could scarcely breathe with absolute fear. Again and again he looked at his triggers, and the hammers, and the little spikes of brass which he hoped would strike death into the ribs of some splendid buck. He began to assure himself that he *could not* tell a buck from a doe if the animal ran quickly; that he *must* shoot at once, and trust to Providence keeping the tender feminine members of the herd out of the way. Indeed, he had already framed an excuse for having shot a doe, and he was busily picturing his assumed regret, and his inner delight at being able to shoot anything, when——

By this time a dead silence had intervened. The first joyous yelping of the dogs had quite died down; and now the

broad-footed, stump-legged, big-headed little animals were wiring themselves through the brushwood, and jumping over the soft moss, with an occasional toss of their long ears or a slight whine. The only sound to be heard was the occasional rattling of sticks by the beaters, accompanied by their peculiar guttural cry.

Suddenly—and the whole empty space of the wood seemed to quiver for a moment with this instantaneous throb of life—Will caught a glimpse of a light shimmer of brown away at the end of one of the long avenues. For a moment the apparition was lost; when it reappeared, it was evident that the deer was bearing down upon Count Schönstein's position. The next second, a fine, lithe, thin-limbed, supple and handsome buck came along in a light, easy canter into the grey light of the opener space. He had no thought of danger before

him; he only thought of that behind; and for a brief space he stood right in front of the Count, apparently listening intently for the strange sounds from which he fled.

In despair, and rage, and amazement, Will saw him pause there, out of the range of *his* shot, and yet without an effort being made to secure the fine pair of horns which graced the animal's head. Will now saw that the Count's gun was levelled, and that he was apparently pulling at the trigger, but no puff of smoke came out of the barrel. Almost at the same moment the deer must have seen the Count; for all at once he shrank back on his limbs, as if he had been struck, shivered lightly through his entire frame, and then, with a sudden leap, he was off and away out of sight, in the direction of Hermann!

In that brief moment of time the Count had taken down his gun, looked at the

hammers, found they were on half-cock, cocked them, and put up his gun again; and then, as the deer was just vanishing, bang! bang! went both the barrels. Of course the buck was quite untouched; but the next moment Will heard the sharp crack of a gun in the neighbourhood of Hermann's post; and he knew what *that* meant.

Even at that distance he could hear the Count breathing out incomprehensible curses at his own stupidity, as he put another couple of cartridges into the barrels. Doubtless in his excitement, he had been trying so often whether the hammers were on full cock—pulling at them, letting them down, and so forth—that accidentally they remained at half-cock, and so spoiled for him the easiest shot he was likely to get that day.

The silence which had been broken by the report of the guns now fell again over the forest. The sun came out, too; and

soon there were straggling lanes of gold running down into the blue twilight of the distance; while the heat seemed to have suddenly awakened a drowsy humming of insect life. Now and then a brightly-plumaged jay would flash through the trees, screaming hoarsely; and then again the same dead, hot stillness prevailed. It was in this perfect silence that a living thing stole out of some short bushes and softly made its way over the golden and green moss until it caught sight of Will. Then it cocked up its head, and calmly regarded him with a cold, glassy, curious stare. The moment it lifted its head he saw that it was a fox, not reddish-brown, but blackish-grey, with extraordinarily bright eyes; and as they had been specially invited to shoot foxes—which are of no use for hunting purposes, and do much damage, in the Black Forest—he instinctively put up his

gun. As instinctively, he put it down again.

"My old prejudices are too strong," he said; wherewith he contented himself with lifting a lump of dried wood and hurling it at the small animal, which now slunk away in another direction.

Then burst out the joyous howl of the beagles—here and there, as if every one of them had started his own particular game; the yelping bark rising at times sharp and clear as if in the immediate neighbourhood, at other times fading away into the distance. The fun had commenced. First there came trotting along a long-necked, thin-legged doe, with a little fawn by her side; and these, catching sight of Will, made a sharp turn to the right and bore down upon the Count. The latter, either too frightened or too savage to care for distinctions of sex or age, again blazed both barrels into the air, with

what effect Will was too much occupied to see.

For at the same moment there came down the line, transversely, crossing in front of the Count, a fine buck which Hermann had taken a long shot at and missed. The deer was going at full speed, careless of anything in front, his whole energy bent on speeding from the danger behind, and every thew and muscle of his body straining its utmost. As he passed, Will fired his right barrel into the flashing streak of brown—not a hair was touched! The next moment the buck, seeing that no further enemy stood in front, wheeled round and made off to cross the path on which Will stood, at some distance farther down. Just as the shoulder of the animal appeared before the lane of trees, the other barrel was sent after him; there was a shrill scream, the buck leapt a dozen feet into the air and fell, without a

parting groan in him, head-foremost on the soft moss.

"There is one pair of horns, at least, for Miss Brunel," thought Will, hastily pushing in two more cartridges.

The Count had certainly plenty of good fortune, so far as the deer were concerned. One particularly handsome buck which had been running straight at him, without seeing him, he received with a hurriedly-aimed shot which did no damage. The animal, however, got such a fright that it turned and galloped right back and through the ring of the beaters, escaping a parting shot which old Spiegelmann aimed at him. Here and there a shot had been heard round the sides of the drive; but as yet no one knew what the other had done. In a few minutes, however, the dogs and then the boys began to show themselves, approaching through the trees. That particular drive was over.

Will hastened up to the Count.

"What have you shot?"

"Nothing."

The Count looked very much vexed; and Will attributed it, of course, to his having missed so many shots.

"Why didn't you shoot sooner at the deer that came up and looked at you?"

"Why?" re-echoed the Count, with a savage laugh. "Why? Because these —— barrels were both on half-cock, and I pulled like to break my fingers over the —— things. What did you shoot?"

"I believe I've left a buck lying down there."

"Why don't you go and look after him, and get somebody to carry him home, instead of waiting here?"

The Count was evidently very uncomfortable. He bit his lip, he worked with the trigger of his gun; and finally he walked

abruptly away from Will, and addressed, in a whisper, the first of the boys who came up.

"Kommen Sie hier."

The boy stared in amazement at being called "Sie." Of course he dared not think that the Count was joking.

"Ich habe geschossen—wissen Sie——?"

"Ja, Herr," said the boy, vaguely, though he did not understand what the Count meant.

"Ein kleines—ein gar kleines—damn it, look here!"

He caught the boy by the shoulder, as if he meant to kick him, and dragged him a few yards further on, and pointed to the ground. The boy opened his eyes: if he had seen the corpse of his first cousin lying there, he could not have been more astonished.

"Sie sehen es," remarked the Count,

hurriedly, with a fine red flush burning in his stout face.

"Ja, Herr."

There lay there a tiny, soft, pretty little animal, scarcely bigger than a King Charles' spaniel, with a glossy light-brown coat, and large meek eyes, now glazed and dull. Blood was trickling from the little thing's mouth, and also from its shoulder: the fact being that the Count, on seeing the doe and her fawn coming up, had fired both his barrels at them on chance, and had managed to destroy the helpless youngling.

If you had told the Count then that before evening every man, woman, and child would have heard of what he had done, that the keepers would be sneering at him and the neighbours laughing at him, he would probably have put another cartridge into his gun and shot himself (if he were able) on the spot. His present anxiety was to get this

little lad to take away the fawn under his blouse and bury it somewhere; but all he could do failed to impress the incorrigible young Schwarzwalder with his meaning.

"Verstehen Sie mir nicht?"

"Ja, Herr."

It was always, "Ja, Herr;" and here were the people coming up. Fortunately, Hermann, having sent a long blast of his horn to recall any straggling beater or keeper, had walked down to the place where Will's slain buck was lying, accompanied by the rest of the keepers, who, as they came up, gravely shook hands with Will, according to custom, and wished him many more such shots. Then Spiegelmann, selecting a peculiarly-shaped branch of young fir, stuck it into Will's hat; by which all and sundry—particularly they of the village—as the shooting-party returned at night,

might know that he had brought down a buck.

At this moment two of the lads dragged up the deer which Hermann had shot; and one of the keepers, with his long killing-knife in hand, proceeded to disembowel the animals, previous to their being carried home. The rest of the party seated themselves on the dryest spot they could find, and somebody produced a couple of chopins of white wine, which were forthwith handed round.

But what of the Count? They had all been so eager to compliment Will on his good fortune, that no one had noticed the Graf's uneasy loitering about the fatal spot where his murdered victim lay.

Presently up came the boy.

"Hermann Löwe, the Herr Graf wants to see you. He has shot a little fawn; but he wont let me bring it."

Hermann rose up, with a flush of vexation over his face. He did not look at his companions, but he knew that they were smiling.

"Young idiot!" he said, when they were out of earshot. "Why didst thou come and say so before all the people?"

"The Herr Graf——"

"Der Teufel! Hast thou no head on thy shoulders?"

The Count was mortally frightened to meet Hermann. He did not know in what manner to conduct himself: whether he should carelessly joke away the matter, or over-awe his forester by the grandeur of his demeanour.

"I see," said Hermann, when he came up; "the Herr Graf will not believe me that there is always time to look—that when there is no time to look, one need not waste powder."

"Bah! stuff! nonsense! I tell you, when they are running like infernal hares, how am I to look at their size to a nicety?"

"The fawns don't run so quickly," said Hermann, respectfully, but firmly.

"Hermann Löwe," said the Count, hotly, "I suppose you're my servant."

"I have that honour, Herr Graf."

"Then you'll please to shut up, that's all, and get that wretched little animal out of the road. Not run quickly! D——n his impudence. I'll have to teach those German thieves some better manners."

With which, and many more muttered grumblings, the Count walked off, leaving Hermann to cover up the dead body of the fawn, and mark the place, so that it could be afterwards taken away and securely buried.

When the Count came up to the rest of the party, he was smiling urbanely.

"Stolen a march upon me, eh?" he said to Will. "On my own ground, too. 'Gad, I'll show you something before we've done. I hadn't the ghost of a chance either time I shot; and it was lucky I missed the second time, because I saw immediately afterwards that it was a doe."

"She had a fawn with her, hadn't she?" said Will.

"Yes," replied the Count, with a sharp glance all round the circle of faces.

Hermann now came up, and chose two of the strongest lads to carry home the two deer. Each lad had one of the animals slung round his shoulders, while he grasped two of its thin legs in either hand, and allowed the neck, head, and horns of the buck to hang down in a picturesque fashion behind him. Will went privately up to one of the boys.

"You know Grete Halm?"

"Yes."

"When you go down to the village, tell Grete to ask the English lady to come back with you; because, if she remains till midday, we may be gone too far from Schönstein. You understand?"

"Yes."

"And you may go up to the Herr Graf's house, and tell any one you may see to send up luncheon an hour earlier than was arranged. You understand?"

"Ja, Herr."

And so the two lads went on their way; and Hermann began to sketch out to his keepers the plan of the next drive.

CHAPTER V.

ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE.

IT was, however, mid-day before Grete Halm and Annie Brunel arrived; and as they entered the forest at the point where the shooting-party was now stationed they found that the drive had already commenced. Will happening to be at the corner post, it devolved upon him to enjoin strict silence upon the new comers; a command which Miss Brunel obeyed by sitting down on the trunk of a felled tree, and beginning to ask Will a series of questions about his morning's adventures.

They were now in a clearance in the

forest some forty yards broad, and on the other side of this strip of open ground ran a long dense mass of brushwood, lying still and silent in the luminous quivering heat. Will, Grete, and Annie Brunel were in the shadow of a patch of young firs, and between them and the dense brushwood extended the forty yards of clearance, with the strong sunlight beating down on the crimson and golden moss, and on the yellow stumps of the felled trees. The air was hot and moist, filled with the pungent resinous odour of the pine—a languid, delicious scented atmosphere, which made one prone to day-dreaming or sleep.

Suddenly, without the rustle of a leaf, and long before any of the dogs had given tongue, there leapt out from the close brushwood into the open sunlight a fine young buck, with his head and horns high in air. The warm light fell on his ruddy, light-

brown coat, and showed his shapely throat, his sinewy form, and tall thin legs, as he stood irresolute and afraid, sniffing the air with his black nostrils, and watching with his full, large eyes. He saw nothing, however, of the people before him in the shadow of the firs; and for several seconds he remained motionless, apparently the only living thing in the dead silence of the place. Then the bark of a dog was heard behind him; he cantered a few steps further on, caught sight of the little party as he passed, and then, doubly nerved, was off like a bolt into the heart of the forest.

"But, really——" said Will.

"Now, don't make me angry with you," said Annie, releasing his right arm, which she had tightly held for three minutes. "I should never have forgiven you if you had shot that poor creature, who looked so timid and handsome——"

"I should have given him the chance of running."

"But you would have killed him. Didn't I see the two you sent home, and their pitiful glazed eyes?"

"Then you have come out to stop our shooting altogether, I suppose," said Will, with a laugh, though he was much more vexed than he chose to show.

But he had his revenge. He had scarcely spoken when a buck, followed by two does, came out of the brushwood some distance further down, the buck springing lightly and buoyantly over the soft moss, the does running more warily in his wake. Before Annie Brunel could do anything beyond utter a short cry, the contents of Will's right barrel had caught the buck on the shoulder. He rolled over, struggled to his feet again, and then, with a last effort, made a few stumbling steps, and sank un-

seen among the ferns. Will turned, with a smile, to Miss Brunel. She had covered her face with her hands. Grete, on the other hand, was in a wonderful state of delight.

"You killed him, Herr, I know you did. I saw him fall; and how handsome he was —and his horns, too, they are large; how pleased you will be to have them! My father will get them mounted for you, if you like; and if you would have the deer's feet for pegs, that can be done. Oh, I wish the drive was over, that I might go to see him!"

The drive was very nearly over, for the dogs were heard in the immediate neighbourhood—particularly the low, sonorous baying of Rudolph, who had escaped from the leash, and was tearing backwards and forwards through the wood, with foam-flakes lying along his glistening brown coat. But

all at once the baying of Rudolph was turned into a terrific yell, subsiding into a howl; and at the same moment the report of a gun was heard at some distance further along. Immediately afterwards Will caught sight of a doe disappearing through the trees behind him, and from the way it ran he judged that it had a broken leg; while down in front of them came Rudolph, going at full speed, with his tail between his legs, and the front of his mouth covered with blood. The next thing seen was Count Schönstein, who came running to Will in a wonderful state of excitement.

"I've shot him!—I've shot him!" he cried, "but we must go after him!"

"Is it Rudolph you mean?" said Will.

"A buck—a splendid buck——"

"Well, don't point your gun in my face."

"It's on half-cock."

"It isn't; and I don't like the muzzle of a gun staring at me."

"Will that do?" cried the Count, in vexation, dropping the gun on the ferns. "*Do* come and help me to catch him——"

"Catch a deer! Listen, Miss Brunel——"

But the Count was off in the direction the wounded doe had taken.

The beaters now made their appearance through the brushwood, and Hermann's horn soon brought the keepers to the rendezvous. Will explained to Hermann that the Graf had gone in pursuit of a doe with a broken leg.

"Has he Rudolph with him?"

"No; I believe he shot Rudolph at the same time that he broke the hind leg of the doe."

"Shot Rudolph!" said Hermann; and then he turned to the keepers. "Where is

Rudolph? Who has seen Rudolph? Who allowed Rudolph to escape?"

The only answer he could get was from a messenger, who came up to say that luncheon had arrived, and wished to know where the Herr Graf wanted it placed. This messenger gave Hermann a graphic description of his having seen Rudolph flying in the direction of Schönstein in a state of utter demoralization. Wherewith Hermann sat himself down on the stump of a tree, and said, resignedly—

"Spiegelmann, take one of the dogs after the wounded doe, and send back the Herr Graf. As for you, Fritz, ask the lady where luncheon is to be placed."

By the time Count Schönstein and Spiegelmann returned, the latter carrying on his shoulder the doe that the Count had shot, luncheon had been laid out by the servants; and round the large white cloth

were placed a series of travelling rugs and other appliances for smoothing down the roughnesses of fern, and stoneberry, and moss. The keepers, Hermann, and the young schoolmaster were seated some little distance off, in picturesque groups, surrounding the dead game, which consisted of two bucks, the Count's doe, a fox shot by Gersbach, and a hare shot by some one else. The men had also their luncheon with them —apples, brown bread, a piece of smoked ham, and a bottle or two of white wine. All the incidents of the drive had now to be recapitulated; and there ensued a perfect Babel of guttural Schwarzwald German.

The Count had ordered out a very nice luncheon indeed; and so pleased was he with his success in having shot something, that he called one of the boys and gave him two bottles of champagne, a drinking-cup, and a lump of ice to take over to the

keepers. Indeed, he would have given Hermann and the schoolmaster an invitation to sit down at the white cloth, only he wished to postpone that explanation about Rudolph until Annie Brunel and Will were out of the way. As for Grete Halm, she equally dreaded the thought of sitting with the Count's party, and of having to go alone among the men and boys opposite; and it was only by much coaxing and ordering that she was made to sit down by Miss Brunel and submit to have the Count himself carve for her and offer her wine in a beautiful little silver cup.

"Süsse an den Süssen," said he, gallantly, as he poured out the champagne; and Grete's soft black eyes looked puzzled.

"Look at the boy in the red blouse," said Annie Brunel, "lying beside the two deer. I believe the Count has got the whole scene made up in imitation of a

hunting-picture, and that the boy knows well enough how fine his brown face and red smock-frock are in the sunlight. Then see how that deer's head lies back, precisely as if it were in a lithograph; and the streaks of sunlight falling across the green dress of the keepers and the stretched-out dogs — and Hermann, there, cutting an apple with a dagger, his hair all matted with perspiration—the schoolmaster sitting on the trunk of the tree, looking vaguely at the fox before him——"

"Wondering," observed Will, "what sort of chemical change has occurred within the last half-hour, or why life should go out of an organism when lead goes in."

"That is a German picture, and here are we making a French picture—only that Grete is such a thorough Black Forester with her bodice, and white sleeves, and head-dress."

The Count was intensely flattered and pleased by her admiration of the impromptu pictures. He had been striving hard to interest and amuse her—most of all had he tried to charm her with the delights which he held at his own command; and here were the very sunlight, and the colours of the forest, and the shape of deer's necks aiding him!

"You don't see the like of that in England, do you?" he said, with his mouth full of cold chicken. "I hope, Miss Brunel, you and Mrs. Christmas will make your stay with us as long as ever you can."

"I should be very glad," she said; "but I must see what Lady Jane says in a day or two—whether she finds herself getting better. If she should prefer the cooler air of mountain scenery, we may go on to Switzerland."

"But don't you dread the idea of travel-

ling alone—looking after your own luggage, and what not?" asked the Count, with his mouth this time full of some other animal's tongue.

"It was not entirely on a pleasure excursion we came," she said, quietly.

"And then," said Will, "you can get plenty of cool mountain air in the Black Forest. You can go and live comfortably on the top of the Feldberg, about 5000 feet high, with a dozen mountains all round you over 4000 feet. In the meantime, don't trouble yourself with thoughts of change; but let me give you some of this jelly. You are very fond of sweets, I know."

"I am. You have been watching me."

He had been watching her too much, he thought. The intense curiosity with which he had regarded the singular change in the girl's nature so soon as she left the stage, with the study of her pretty, superficial careless-

ness, her frank, audacious manner, and her quaint, maternal, matter-of-fact attitude towards himself, had wrought its inevitable work; and at the very moment when she was thinking that Mr. Anerley took a friendly pleasure in her society, he was longing to get away from it as from a torture too heavy to be borne—longing to get away, and unable to go. He might easily have avoided her on this very day, for example, by pleading business occupations; instead, he had looked with impatience for her arrival all the morning and forenoon.

And if he had any intellectual pleasure in studying the curious shades of the young actress's character, it was well that he improved his time; for this was the last day on which she should ever appear to him that enigmatical compound of a childlike gaiety and mimicry with a matronly air which was quite as amusingly unnatural.

From this period henceforth, the reader who takes the trouble to follow Annie Brunel's history, will find her a changed woman—drawing nearer to that beautiful ideal which one who knew her mother would have expected to find in Annie Napier's only child.

At present she was chiefly concerned with the various sweets which Count Schönstein's cook had sent, and also in trying the effect of squeezing the juice of different kinds of fruit into the iced champagne which she sipped from time to time. She came to the conclusion that sliced apple added to champagne and iced water greatly improved its flavour; and she appealed to Grete Halm, who had tried all her different specifics, the two drinking out of the same glass. Grete began to fancy that English ladies, though they were very beautiful and had magnificent hair, were little better than children, to amuse themselves with such nonsense.

"I see that Hermann is getting dreadfully impatient," said Miss Brunel, at last; "let us go."

"Pardon, mademoiselle," said Will. "Let us have an understanding first."

She laughed a bright and merry laugh that puzzled the Count extremely.

"Was gibt's, Grete?" said he.

Grete began to explain, with a demure smile, how the Fräulein had held the Herr's arm when a buck was going past; but the Count soon lost the thread of the story, and had to beg Will for a translation.

"I really can't bear to see any one else shoot when I am looking on," said Miss Brunel. "But if I were myself shooting, I daresay I shouldn't care."

"Come, then," said Will, "will you take my gun during the next drive? I will teach you how to hold it and fire——"

"I know that already," she said. It was

not the first time she had fired a gun—on the stage.

"And I will fix the gun so that you need have no trouble."

"Agreed," she said; while Grete, who was about to remain behind to assist in packing up the luncheon things, assured her that the holding the gun was quite easy, and that she would be sure to kill a splendid deer.

They had to walk nearly half a mile before they came to the next beat; and by that time they had arrived at a sort of broad ravine or hollow, the hill leading down to which was covered with tall, branchless pines. Down in the valley commenced a tract of young trees and brushwood, which was supposed to be full of deer. While the beaters were drawing a circle round this tract of brushwood, Hermann posted the guns and courteously gave Will the Haupt-

platz, understanding that the young lady was about to try her luck. At this point there was a mass of earth and roots which had been torn up by the falling of a pine—a little embankment some five feet high, over which one could easily command the whole line of brushwood lying in front. This was the spot where Will posted Annie Brunel. He placed the barrel of the gun on the edge of this natural rampart, and then showed her how, whenever she saw a deer spring out into the sunlight down below in the valley, she was noiselessly to point the gun, keep the stock well against her shoulder, and fire.

"Only take care," said he, "that it isn't a dog or a boy that comes out of the bushes."

"What if I shoot you?" she said.

"You can't shoot me, any more than you can shoot yourself. I shall go up the hill a

bit to overlook you, and if it should be a dog, I'll shout out before you murder him."

Here the long, low, steady call of Spiegelmann's horn was heard, with Hermann's reply.

"When the next horn calls, you may begin to look out. Hold out your hand."

She held out her right hand, wonderingly, and showed him the small white fingers.

"It is quite steady; but your heart beats."

"It generally does," she said, with a smile. "It is a weakness, I know, but——"

Here the fine anticipatory flourish of the keeper's bugle again came echoing through the trees. Will gave over the gun to her, told her to take time and not be afraid, and then retired somewhat further up the hill. He ensconced himself behind a tall grey pine, whence, without being seen, he could

command a view of the entire length of brushwood, and of Miss Brunel in her place of concealment.

"If she only remains cool," he thought, "she is certain to be successful."

Once only she looked round and up the hill towards him, and there was a sort of constrained smile about her lips.

"I am afraid she is getting frightened," he thought now.

The intense, sultry silence of the place certainly heightened her nervous expectation, for she could distinctly hear her heart thumping against her side. Expectancy became a positive pain—an agony that seemed to be choking her; but never for a moment did she think of abandoning her post.

Meanwhile Will's experienced eye failed to detect the least motion among the bushes, nor could he hear the faintest noise

from the dogs. Yet Hermann had told him that this was one of the best beats in the neighbourhood; and so he patiently waited, knowing that it was only a matter of time.

At length one of the dogs was heard to bellow forth his joyous discovery. Will's breath began to come and go more quickly, in his intense anxiety that his pupil should distinguish herself at the approaching crisis. Then it seemed to him that at some distance off he saw one or two of the young firs tremble, when there was not a breath of wind to stir them.

He watched these trees and the bushes adjoining intently, but they were again quite motionless; the dog, too, only barked at intervals. All at once, however, he saw, coming down a lane in the brushwood, two branched yellow tips, which paused and remained stationary, with only a single bush between them and the open space fronting

Miss Brunel. They were the horns of a deer which now stood there, uncertain by which way to fly from the dogs behind him.

"If she could only catch sight of these horns," he said to himself, "and understand to fire through the bush, she would kill him to a certainty."

Evidently, however, she did not see the horns; perhaps her position prevented her. So, with his own heart beating rapidly now, Will waited for the moment when the dogs would drive the deer out into the clear sunlight, immediately underneath the muzzle of her gun.

A sharp bark from one of the beagles did it. Will saw the light spring of the deer out into the open, and the same glance told him that Annie Brunel had shrank back with a light cry, and that the gun, balanced for a moment on the edge of the mass of roots, was about to fall on the ground.

At the same moment he received an astounding blow on the side that nearly knocked him over; and his first instinct was that of an Englishman—to utter an oath, clench his fist, and turn round to find a face to strike at. But before the instinct had shaped itself into either thought or action, the sudden spasm passed into a sort of giddiness—he fancied the pine-tree before him wavered—put out his hand to guard himself, and then fell, with a loud noise in his ears.

When Miss Brunel saw the gun tumble on the ground and heard the report, she clasped her hands over her eyes in a vague instantaneous horror of any possible result. The next moment she looked up, and there was a black mass lying on the ground, behind the tall tree. Her only thought was that he lay dead there as she ran to him, and knelt down by him, and caught him

round the neck. White-lipped, trembling in every limb, and quite unconscious of what she did, she put her head down to his, and spoke to him. There were three words that she uttered in that moment of delirious pity, and self-reproach, and agony, which it was as well he did not hear; but uttered they were, never to be recalled.

When he came to himself, he saw a white face bending over him, and had but a confused notion of what had occurred. With a vigorous effort, however, mental and physical, he pulled himself together and got into a sitting posture.

"I must have given you such a fright through my stupidity," he said; but all the time he wondered to see a strange look in her eyes—a look he had never seen there before *off the stage*—as she knelt by him and held his hand in hers. She did not speak; she only looked at him, with a

vague absent delight, as if she were listening to music.

"Poor creature," he thought, "she does not know how to say that she is sorry for having hurt me."

So he managed to get up a quite confident smile, and struggled to his feet, giving her his hand to raise her also.

"I suppose you thought you had killed me," he said, with a laugh, "but it was only the fright knocked me over. I am not hurt at all. Look here, the charge has lodged in the tree."

He showed her a splinter or two knocked off the bark of the tree, and a few round holes where the buck-shot had lodged; but at the same time he was conscious of a warm and moist sensation creeping down his side and down his arm likewise. Further, he pretended not to see that there was a line of red blood trickling gently over his hand,

and that her dress had already caught a couple of stains from the same source.

"What's that?" she said, with a terrified look, looking from her own hand, which was likewise stained, to his. "It is blood—you have been hurt, and you wont tell me. Don't be so cruel," she added, piteously, "but tell me what I am to do, for I know you are hurt. What shall I do? Shall I run to Hermann? Shall I go for the Count? There is no water here——"

"Sit down on those ferns—that's what you must do," said Will, "and don't distress yourself. I suppose one of the spent shot has scratched me, or something like that; but it is of no importance, and you mustn't say anything about it. When the drive is over, I shall walk home. If I had only a little—a little——"

By this time he had sate down, and as

he uttered the words, another giddiness came over him and he would have fallen back had she not hastily caught him and supported him.

"It is the blood," he said, angrily; "one would think I couldn't afford to lose as much as the scratch of a penknife would let. Will you allow me to take off my coat—and if you could tie a handkerchief tightly round my arm——"

"Oh, why did you not ask me to do so before?" she said, as she helped to uncover the limb that was by this time drenched in blood.

"Think of what the deer would have suffered if you had hit him instead of me," said Will, with a ghastly smile. "He was a dozen yards nearer you. You seem to like long shots."

But there was a mute, pleading look in her eyes that seemed to appeal against his

banter. She seemed to say to him by that dumb expression, "You wrong me. You try to make us strangers by that assumed fun. You do it to cheer me; but you make me a stranger to you, for you are not honest with me."

And somehow he read the meaning of her face; and said to her, in a low voice—

"Shall I be frank with you? This accident is likely to make us too close friends; and it is better I should return to England, if you remain here."

For a moment their eyes met—on his side revealing a secret which she inwardly shuddered to read there—on hers repeating only that mystic, unfathomable expression which he remembered to have seen when he awakened out of his dream.

That was all of explanation that passed between them. She knew now his secret, and by the sudden light of the revelation

she looked swiftly back over some recent occurrences and saw the purport of them written in words of fire. Her eyes fell; her own secret was safe; but this new burden of consciousness was almost as difficult to bear.

At this moment the Count and Hermann came up, followed by the nearest keepers and beaters.

"There has been a slight accident," said Will, briefly. "Get some one to carry my gun; and I'll walk back to Schönstein."

"If you would like to ride," said Hermann—who, with the others, was quite deceived by Will's manner—"you can get Hans Halm's *wagen*, that was waiting for the baskets and things. Spiegelmann will show you the way. You are not badly hurt?"

"Not at all; not at all. Miss Brunel, will you continue with the party?"

"No," she said, firmly, "I am going back to Schönstein."

"And I," said the Count. "I can't allow you to go unattended. I don't care about any more shooting——"

"Nonsense," said Will (with an inward conviction that two minutes' more talking would find him stretched on the ground), "go on with your sport; and I'll come out to meet you in the evening."

Fortunately, when they reached the shaky old travelling-carriage outside the forest, they found some wine, a good draught of which somewhat revived the wounded man. The hampers and other things were speedily thrown out, and, Spiegelmann having returned to the shooting-party, Will and Miss Brunel got into the vehicle and were driven homewards.

Neither spoke a single word all the way. Once, and quite inadvertently, her hand

touched his; and she drew it away. The next moment she looked into his face, and perhaps saw some slight shade of vexation there, for she immediately covered his stained fingers with her own. It was as though she said, "I know your sad secret, but we may at least continue friends."

CHAPTER VI.

FLIGHT.

IT was a change indeed! Life all at once became solemn and full of mystery to her—full of trouble, too, and perplexity. So soon as a messenger had been despatched to Donaueschingen for a surgeon who was skilled in the extraction of buck-shot, Annie Brunel went up to her own room, and sat down there alone. And she felt as if the air had grown thick around her, and was pressing on her; she felt that the old audacious cheerfulness had gone from her, and that the passion, and glow, and terrible earnestness of her stage-life were invading

this other life, which used to be full of a frivolous, careless happiness.

Do the other animals become frightened and nervous when the love-making season comes suddenly upon them? Does the lark, when her lover comes down from the sky and sings "My dear soft-breasted little thing, will you be my wife, will you come and build a nest with me, and let me bring you scraps of food when you are tired"—does she get into a state of great tremor, and fancy that the world has suddenly shifted its axis? We know how the least impressionable of men are over-awed by this strange natural phenomenon. The old ridiculousness of love—its silliness and comic aspects—are immediately blotted out from their mind by the contemplation of the awful truth—the awful change that lies before them. They shrink from physiology as a species of blasphemy. They will not accept

scientific explanation of their idealisms; nor will they believe that any man has ever experienced the sensation they now experience.

But the ordinary awakening of a man or woman to the consciousness of being in love was a very different thing from the sudden revelation which confronted the young actress, as she sate there and pondered, in a bewildered way, over the events of the past hour. To love this man was a crime —and its fatal consequences seemed to stretch on and on, and interweave themselves with her whole future life. How had she fallen into the snare? And he was equally guilty; for his eyes, more fully than his words, had in that supreme moment told her his tragic story.

She thought of the violet-eyed Dove down in that Kentish vale. She thought of her, and mentally prayed for forgiveness.

She had but one sad consolation in the matter; her secret was her own. There now remained for her but to leave Schönstein at once, and the morning's events had paved the way for her decision. So she sent for Mrs. Christmas, and said to her—

"Don't you think a cooler air than what we have here would suit you better?"

The old woman scrutinized her face curiously.

"What's the matter with you, Miss Annie? You look as if you had just come off the stage, and were half-bewildered by the part you had been playing?"

"I want an answer, Mrs. Christmas. But I may tell you that I ask because I wish to leave this place at once. You needn't ask why; but if it will not incommode you to travel, I should like to go away now. There is Switzerland, not a day's journey from here; and there are some mountainous dis-

tricts in this neighbourhood—you may choose which you please——"

"Only I must choose to go," said the old woman, patting her cheek. "That's yourself all over as you used to be in the days when you tyrannized over me, and would always have your own way about arranging your parts. Well, Miss Annie, I'm ready to go now, if you like—only Hermann promised to give me two of the most beautiful deer skins to be got in the Black Forest——"

"They can be sent after us."

The evening was drawing towards dusk when the Count returned. He was greatly shocked on discovering that the accident Will had met with was much more serious than had been fancied, and that the surgeon only stared in astonishment when asked if his patient could come downstairs to dinner.

"A man who has lost so much blood,"

said he, significantly, and speaking slowly, that the Count might understand him, "and who suffers from four or five gunshot wounds, is not likely to sit at table for a day or two."

Annie Brunel did not hear this conversation, and as she still believed that Will had only been slightly hurt, and would be able to go about as usual, she informed the Count at dinner of her intended departure. The Herr Graf looked from one to the other of his guests, without being able to utter a syllable. He had been congratulating himself on the brilliant success of this excursion —on the evident gratification experienced by Miss Brunel, on her expressed admiration for Schönstein and all its surroundings. This decision of hers quashed his dearest hopes.

"You surely do not intend to leave us so soon?" he said. "Mrs. Christmas, are you the traitor in the camp?"

Mrs. Christmas prudently forbore to reply.

"Think of leaving Mr. Anerley, after having knocked him over in that sportsman-like fashion!" exclaimed the Count. "He will think it very ungenerous of you."

"I am extremely sorry," she said, with a look of pained embarrassment on her dark, beautiful face; "but I hope he will forgive our going."

"He may, but I shan't," said the Count. "However, if you will, you will. In any case, I hope I may be allowed to escort you towards your new resting-place."

"We should be more cruel still," said the young girl, "if we took you away from your friend. Believe me, we shall want no assistance."

The tone with which she uttered the words was decisive. It said, "You are very kind; but we mean to go alone."

The Count did not enjoy his dinner that evening. He fancied there was something wrong in the arrangement of things—something incomprehensible, provoking, beyond the reach of his alteration. When he persuaded Annie Brunel and her guardian to accept his escort as far as Schönstein, he fancied his skilful calculations had delivered her into his hand. Was there a creature on earth—especially a woman—who could fail to be smitten with a covetous desire for the possession of Schönstein? During that moody meal, while he sate almost angrily silent, two suggestions occurred to him.

Could she have failed to perceive that she might be mistress of Schönstein if she liked? The Count confessed that he had not made any demonstration of affection to her, simply because he wished the natural effect of living at Schönstein to influence her first,

and predispose her towards accepting his more openly avowed attentions.

Or was it possible that she had discovered her true position, and learned for herself the wealth and rank to which she was entitled? But if she had made this discovery, he argued with himself, she would not have allowed herself to be the guest of a *parvenu* Count; while he knew that she had received no letters since his arrival.

Seizing the more probable alternative, he bitterly regretted his not having made it more clear to her that a handsome fortune awaited her acceptance. In the meantime these regrets had the effect of making the dinner a somewhat dull affair; and it was rather gruffly that he consented, after dinner, to go round to the inn in order to inquire of Hans Halm the various routes to Switzerland.

As they were going out, she said—

"Will you send word to Mr. Anerley that we shall only be absent for a short time, and that I hope he may be able to come down and see us when we return?"

"The surgeon is still with him," said the Count. "I shall go up and see him myself when we come back."

It was a clear, starlight night; the waning moon had not yet arisen. As they neared the few houses of Schönstein, and saw the orange lights gleaming through the dusk, Mrs. Christmas caught her companion's arm.

They were by the side of the garden adjoining the inn, and from a summer-house which was half hid among apple and plum trees, there came the sweet and tender singing of two young girls—a clear and high, but somewhat undeveloped soprano, and a rich, full, mellow contralto. The three stood for a moment to listen, and the singers in the darkness proceeded to another song—

the old *Volksweise* that Grete and Hermann had been wont to sing.

"Im schönsten Wiesen-grunde
Ist meiner Heimath Haus,
Da zog ich manche Stunde,
In's Thal hinaus:
Dich, mein stilles Thal, grüsz ich tausend Mal!
Da zog ich manche Stunde, in's Thal hinaus."

"It is Grete who sings, and I want to see her," said Annie Brunel, stepping softly into the garden, and advancing to the summer-house.

Grete was quite alone with her companion —a young girl who, Miss Brunel could see even in that partial darkness, was very pretty and of a type much more common in the north of Baden and Bavaria than in the Schwarzwald. She was not over twelve years of age; but she had the soft, grave eyes, the high forehead, the flaxen hair, and general calm of demeanour which characterize the intellectual South German. She

was Grete's confidante and companion; and together, whenever they got a chance, they were accustomed to steal away to this summer-house and sing those concerted melodies which the children of the Black Forest drink in with their mother's milk.

Grete gave a little cry of surprise when she saw the dark form of the young English lady appear; and then her thought was that something had gone wrong with the gentleman who was wounded.

"I want you, Grete, for a moment," said Annie Brunel in French to her.

"Ah, mademoiselle," she said, dislocating her French in sudden compassion, "ce n'est pas que Monsieur Anerley se sent encore malade? L'homme qui mon père envoyait chercher le médecin me dit qu'il va meilleur——"

"Don't disquiet yourself, Grete," said Miss Brunel. "Mr. Anerley is not severely

hurt. I wanted to ask you if you would come with me to Switzerland——"

"To Switzerland!" said Grete; and her companion's soft eyes looked up with a mystic wonder in them.

"Would you like to go?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, very much; but I have promised to go to see my cousin Aenchen Baumer, at the Feldberg, in a day or two."

"Come in-doors, and let us hear what your father says. Your friend will forgive me for a few minutes."

They all then left the garden and went round to the front of the inn. They found the Count and Mrs. Christmas standing outside, and listening to the prodigious singing-bout which was being held within by the keepers and the beaters; the chorus following each verse of the various hunting-songs being accompanied by the measured beating

of hands and feet on the tables and wooden floor.

"If mademoiselle goes forward to the window," said the little, grave German girl with the yellow hair, "she will hear better, and Herr Spiegelmann is about to sing 'Der Weisze Hirsch.'"

They all went forward to one of the many small windows, and looked in. The men were sitting in a picturesque undress round the table, their long-bowled china pipes in their fingers or mouth, and chopins of pale yellow wine before them. Grete's father was standing by, laughing and joking with them; the old grandmother from time to time replenishing the tall transparent bottles. They had all been singing the elaborate chorus to the hunting-song, "Im Wald und auf der Haide"—all except the ancient Spiegelmann, who sat solemnly over his pipe-tube, and winked his small black

eyes occasionally as if trying to shut in the internal pleasure the rattling melody gave him. His large black moustache caught the tobacco-smoke that issued from his lips; and his wrinkled weather-tanned face, like the other sunburnt faces around, caught a bronzed glow from the solitary candle before him.

"The Spiegelmann missed a buck in the second drive," said one. "He will pay the forfeit of a song."

"I was driving, not shooting, the roe," growled the Spiegelmann, though he was not displeased to be asked to sing.

All at once, before any of his comrades were prepared, the venerable keeper, blinking fiercely, began to sing, in a low, querulous, plaintive voice, the first stanza of a well-known ballad, which ran somewhat in this fashion—

"'Twas into the forest three sportsmen went,
On shooting the white deer they were bent."

Suddenly, and while Miss Brunel fancied that the old man was singing a pathetic song of his youth, there rang out a great hoarse chorus from a dozen bass voices—the time struck by a couple of dozen horny hands on the table—

"Husch, husch! bang, bang! trara!"

Then Spiegelmann, gravely and plaintively as before, took up the thread of the wondrous story—

"They laid themselves down beneath a fir tree,
And a wonderful dream then dreamed the three,
(*All.*) Husch, husch! bang, bang! trara."

Here a tall, Italian-looking keeper, who hailed from the Tyrol, and who was sitting next to Spiegelmann, sang forth the experiences of the first dreamer—

"I dreamt that as I went beating the bush,
There ran out before me the deer—husch, husch!"

His neighbour, Bagel, who had once been complimented by Kaiser Francis of Austria, and was never done with the story, personated the second dreamer—

"And as from the yelp of the beagle he sprang,
I riddled his hide for him there—bang, bang!"

The third from Spiegelmann, a short, stout little man, called Falz, who had once been a clockmaker in Whitechapel, was the next dreamer—

"So soon as the deer on the ground I saw,
I merrily sounded my horn, trara!"

The burden of the tale now returned to Spiegelmann, who thus finished it, and pointed the moral—

"Lo! as they lay there and chatted, these three,
Swiftly the wild deer ran past the tree:
And ere the three huntsmen had seen him aright,
O'er hill and o'er valley he'd vanished from sight!
(*All.*) Husch, husch! bang, bang! trara!
Husch, husch! bang, bang! trara!"

"I declare," said little Mrs. Christmas,

standing on tip-toe, to peep in at the window on the bronzed faces, and the dim candle, and the long narrow tables in the low-roofed room, "it is quite like a scene in a play, though they don't sing very well."

"They keep capital time," said the Count, who looked upon them as so many performing animals, belonging to himself.

"Voulez-vous entrer, mademoiselle?" said Grete, hesitatingly. "La fumée—j'en suis bien fâchée——"

She went into the inn, nevertheless; and Hans Halm was summoned to give his opinion about the various roads leading down to Basle or Schaffhausen. Meanwhile, the keepers had sent a polite message, through Margarethe, to the young English lady, hoping that she enjoyed the day's sport; that her companion's accident had not been serious; and that she would not be annoyed

to hear one or two of the old Schwarzwald songs.

It was now for the first time that Annie learned the true extent of the injury which Will had suffered; and this had the effect of immediately altering her resolutions. It was with a dangerous throb of the heart that she was told how he might not leave his bed for days, or even weeks, so prostrated was he by loss of blood; and anxious—terribly anxious, as she was to get free from the place, she could not bear the thought of stealing away, and leaving him to the unknown chances of the future.

The Count had almost began to fancy that it was the horror of the accident that she had caused which was driving her away from the too painful witnessing of its results; but she now said that she would not leave until Will was entirely out of danger. He could not understand her, or her motives;

above all, he was puzzled by the unwonted earnestness of her expression—its new life and intensity. He knew nothing of the fire at the heart which kept that slumbering light in the dark eyes.

"And in a few days, Grete, you go to the Feldberg?" she asked.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"There is an inn there at which one can stay?"

"There is, mademoiselle. Right on the top of the mountain, if you choose to go so high. My cousin Aenchen lives down in the valley."

"I hope, Miss Brunel," said the Count, anxiously, "you won't think of leaving Schönstein so long as you remain in this district. The accident which has happened, I know, may rob the neighbourhood of some of its attractions: but what better will the Feldberg be?"

She paid no attention to him. She was only determined not to see Will Anerley again; and yet there was in her heart a vague desire to be near him—to be under the same daylight—to look on the same scenes, and hear the same quaint, strange talk that he listened to.

"When must you go to see your cousin?" she asked.

"Very shortly," said Grete. "Aenchen Baumer goes to a convent in Freiburg, where she will learn English, and fine needlework, and many things. She is a good friend of mine, and a companion once; and I want to see her before she goes."

"If you wait a few days, we shall go to the Feldberg together."

Grete clasped her hands with delight.

"And will madame, your mamma, go also?" she asked, rejoiced to think she had not the journey to make alone.

"Yes; but the lady is not my mamma, Grete. *She* died when I was scarcely your age; and this is my second mother, who has been with me ever since."

All the next day she waited, lingering about, and unable to do anything in her feverish anxiety and impatience. She was not afraid to see him. She had suddenly been awakened to a sweet and new consciousness of strength—a fulness of life and will which she knew would sustain her in any emergency. She had no fear whatever, so far as she herself was concerned. But she dreaded the possible effect of their meeting again in these too seductive circumstances; she dreaded it, while she thought of Dove. Already there lay over her the shadow of the wrong done to the bright young English girl whose pretty ways and violet eyes she so well remembered—a wrong inscrutable, not to be condoned or forgotten.

Whose was the fault? She only knew that she dared no longer stay there after having once read Will's secret in that quick mutual glance in the forest.

Another day passed, and yet another: the torment was becoming unbearable. She could not leave the place while danger yet hung over him; on the other hand, her delay was provoking the chances of that very meeting which she had resolved should not take place. Many a time she thought she could go away happy and content if only she might shake hands with him and look once in his eyes: then there came a misty remembrance of Dove's face floating before her, and the young girl seemed to regard her reproachfully.

She began to think that a little far-off glimpse of him would do: moderating her desires, she grew to long for that as the one supreme boon, bearing which with her she

could go away with a glad heart. Only a glimpse of him, to see how he looked, to bid a mute farewell to him, herself unseen.

"Our patient is much better this morning," said the Count to her, on the fourth day. "Won't you come upstairs, and see him?"

"No," she said, softly, looking down.

She was more incomprehensible to him than ever. Formerly she seemed to be quite familiar with him; she was happy and careless in his presence; she responded to his nonsense with nonsense of her own. Now she seemed to have been translated to another sphere. He was no longer jovial and jocular with her. He watched and studied the Madonna-like calm of the clear, dark face, until he felt a sort of awe stealing over him: the intense, dark life of her eyes was a mystery to him.

In these few days she began to wonder if

she were not rapidly growing old: it seemed to her that everything around her was becoming so serious and so sad.

"And if I do look old, who will care?" she said to herself, bitterly.

The Count, on the other hand, fancied she had never been so beautiful; and, as he looked on her, he tried to gladden his heart by the thought that he was not a mercenary man. To prove to her and himself that he was not, he swore a mental oath that he would be rejoiced to see her a beggar, that so he might lift her up to his high estate. Indeed, so mad was the man at the time—so much *beside* himself was he—that he was ready to forswear the only aim of his life, and would have married Annie Brunel only too willingly, had it been proved to him that she was the daughter of a gipsy.

"Another day's rest is all that the doctor has prescribed," said the Count. "I hope

to see our friend down to breakfast to-morrow morning."

"Is he so much better?" she asked.

She inquired in so earnest a tone that he fancied her anxiety was to know if the damage she had done was nearly mended, and so he said—

"Better? He is quite better now. I think he might come down and see us this morning, unless you would prefer paying *him* a visit."

Immediately after breakfast Miss Brunel went over to the inn, and there she found Hans Halm and his daughter.

"Grete," she said, "could you go to the Feldberg to-day?"

"Yes," said Grete.

"Could you be ready to start by twelve o'clock?"

"My father's *wagen* has gone to Donaueschingen, mademoiselle," she said.

"The Count will lend us a carriage, and you must come with me."

The matter having been arranged, she returned to the Count, and told him of her intention, firmly and quietly. A week previous, he would have laughed and poohpoohed the notion; now he was excessively courteous, and, though he regretted her decision, he would do everything in his power, &c.

"Will you let Hermann come with us as far as the Feldberg?"

"I devote Hermann entirely to your service for a week—a month—as long as you choose," said the Count.

English Polly was got up from the kitchen — where she had established a species of freemasonry between herself and the German servants — to assist in the packing; and while she and Mrs. Christmas were so engaged, Annie Brunel

sate down, and wrote these lines on a slip of paper—

"*I am glad to hear you are better. You wished us not to meet again, and as it is easier for me to go than you, I leave here in an hour. You will forgive me for having caused you so much pain. Good-bye. A. B.*"

She put the paper in an envelope, and took it down to the Count.

"I have written a note to Mr. Anerley, explaining our going away so abruptly. Will you please send it to him?"

"I will take it to him myself," said the Count, and he took it.

A few minutes afterwards, when the Count returned, she was seated at the window, looking out with vague, absent eyes on the great undulations of the black-green forest, on the soft sunlight that lay upon the hills along the horizon, and on the little nook of Schönstein with the brown

houses, the white church, and the large inn. She started slightly as he entered. He held another envelope in his hand.

"I have brought a reply," he said, "but a man does not write much with his left hand, in bed."

On a corner of the sheet of paper she had sent, there were written these words, "*I thank you heartily. God bless you! W. A.*" And her only thought as she read them was, "Not even in England: not even in England."

Grete appeared, blushing in her elaborate finery. Her violet bodice was resplendent, with its broad velvet collar embroidered with gold; her snow-white sleeves were full-blown and crimp; and her hair was braided, and hung down in two long tails from underneath the imposing black head-dress, with its ornamentation of gold beads. Grete had manufactured another of those

embroidered miracles, which she was now carrying in her trunk to Aenchen Baumer. It was with a little sob of half-hysteric delight that she drove out of the stone court-yard and realized the stupendous fact that Hermann Löwe was to accompany them to the Feldberg.

Mrs. Christmas, studying the strange expression of her adopted daughter's face, thought she was becoming remarkably like the Annie Napier whom she knew long ago.

"May she have a very different fate!" said the old woman to herself, as she thought of the weary and solitary life-struggle, the self-denial, the heroic fortitude of those bygone and bitter days.

CHAPTER VII.

HOMEWARDS.

"IF mademoiselle chooses," said Grete, "we can walk along the side of the Titi See, and allow the carriage to go on by itself. The road is very pretty from the lake onwards to the Feldberg."

Mademoiselle was in that frame of mind when any change involving action was a delicious relief, and she gladly embraced the proposal.

"If the old lady prefers to drive all the way," said Grete, with a touch of maidenly pride, "Hermann ought to accompany her. I can find the way for us two, mademoiselle."

That also was agreed to, the distance being too great for Mrs. Christmas to walk. And so Annie Brunel and Grete Halm set out upon the winding path, or rather track, which runs along the shore of the beautiful Titi See—here skirting the edge of the rocky promontories which jut out into the still blue lake, there cutting through the dense coppices lying in the sunshine along the foot of the hills, or again passing some deep-roofed and sleepy farmhouse, with its small stone chapel standing in the yard. Grete reverentially crossed herself every time they passed one of these numerous private chapels; and her companion, peeping in through the wooden bars, generally saw within the sanctuary a large framed lithograph of the Virgin Mary in red and blue, with a vast number of little gilt trinkets and other pious offerings lying on the altar. Some of these chapels had forms

within capable of accommodating a congregation of from twelve to twenty persons. One or two people had built no chapel at all, but had hollowed out a niche in the wall surrounding their garden, and had placed therein a wooden crucifix, more or less painted, exhibiting the details of the crucifixion with mediæval exactitude. And Grete, being a good girl, crossed herself as she saw these humble memorials of a devout faith.

"Why did you send Hermann away, Grete?" said Annie Brunel, as they walked along.

"Because, mademoiselle, I wished him to know that I could do without him," said Grete Halm.

"You are very fond of him, are you not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, but——"

"And he of you?"

"He is very fond of me, I know," said Grete, simply.

"I don't wonder at it; but have you ever asked yourself why he is fond of you?"

"Why, mademoiselle? Because — because I am a girl and he is a man, and he wants to be married."

Annie Brunel laughed; it was the first smile her companion had seen on her face for some days.

"But suppose he did not want to be married—suppose he could not be married to you—would he be fond of you? Or suppose you knew, Grete, that he was to marry some one else, what would you do?"

"I should do nothing, mademoiselle; I should be miserable."

"You would not cease to love him?"

"If I could, yes; if not——"

"If not, you would only be miserable."

The tone in which the words were uttered caused Grete to look up suddenly in her companion's face. She saw nothing there but the inwardly-reflecting eyes, the beautiful, pale, dark complexion, and the placid sweetness of the unkissed lips.

"In England, Grete, I am an actress. They say that an actress must never reflect, that she lives for immediate gratification, that she educates impulses, and that she cannot pause, and regard her position, and criticize herself. If I cease to feel any pleasure in immediate gratifications, if I feel ill at ease, and dissatisfied with myself, and fancy that the stage would no longer give me any pleasure—must I cease to be an actress?"

"Is mademoiselle in earnest?"

Grete Halm could not believe that her companion was an actress. Had she ever seen, even in Carlsruhe itself, an actress

with such a noble air, with such a face, and such a manner?

"I am in earnest, Grete. I have been an actress all my life; I feel as if I were one no longer."

"What has changed you, mademoiselle, may I be permitted to ask?"

"I do not know myself, Grete. But I have turned an old woman since I came to the Black Forest; and I shall go back to England with a sort of fear, as if I had never been there before."

Since she came to the Black Forest. For a moment a suspicion crossed Grete's mind that she must be miserable through loving some one; but so completely had she been imbued with the idea of her companion being some mysteriously beautiful and noble creature, who could not be moved by the meaner loves and thoughts of a girl like herself, that she at once dismissed the

supposition. Perhaps, she thought, the shock of severely injuring her friend still affected her, and had induced a temporary despondency. Grete therefore resolved, in her direct way, to be as amusing as possible; and she never tired of directing her companion's attention to the beautiful and wonderful things they saw on their way—the scarlet grasshoppers which rattled their wings among the warm grass, the brilliantly-coloured beetles, the picturesque crucifixes by the wayside, or the simultaneous splash of a lot of tiny fish among the reeds as some savage pike made a rush at them from the deeper water.

In process of time they left the soft blue breadth of the lake behind them, and found themselves in the valley leading up to the Feldberg. Grete struck an independent, zigzag course up the hill's side, clambering up rocky slopes, cutting through patches of

forest, and so on, until they found themselves on the high mountain road leading to their destination. Nothing was to be seen of the carriage; and so they went on alone, into the silence of the tall pines, while the valley beneath them gradually grew wider, and the horizon beyond grew more and more distant. Now they were really in the Black Forest of the old romances—not the low-lying districts, where the trees are of modern growth, but up in the rocky wilderness where the magnificent trunks were encrusted and coated with lichens of immemorial age—where the spongy yellow-green moss, here and there of a dull crimson, would let a man sink to the waist—where the wild profusion of underwood was rank and strong with the heat of the sun and the moisture of innumerable streams trickling down their rocky channels in the hill-side—where the yellow light, falling between the

splendid stems of the trees, glimmered away down the narrow avenues, and seemed to conjure up strange forms and faces out of the still brushwood and the fantastic grey lichens which hung everywhere around. Several times a cock capercailzie, with two or three hens under his protection, would rise with a prodigious noise and disappear in the green darkness overhead; occasionally a mountain-hare flew past; and Grete, with an inherited interest, pointed out to her friend the tiny footmarks of the deer on the sand of the rough and winding road.

"See, mademoiselle, there is Aenchen Baumer's house."

They had come to an opening in the pines which revealed the broad yellow valley beneath, with its sunlit road running like a thread of silk through it. Grete's friend's house was a little white building, with green casrments, and a few vines growing up one

of the gables; it was separated from the road by a paling which interrupted the long line of rough stone posts which a paternal government had stuck in the ground to prevent carriages tumbling still further down into the bed of the hollow.

"You have come a long way out of your road, Grete," said Miss Brunel.

"I came to accompany you, mademoiselle. I can easily go back to Aenchen's house before the evening."

The upward road now grew more and more jagged, rough, and full of mud-holes, until, at last, they left the forest region altogether, and got into the high pasture districts of the mountain. Finally, as the path became a track, grass-grown and rocky, they arrived at a square grey building, with a small garden attached, which stood on the summit of the shoulder of the hill.

"It is the Feldberg Inn," said Grete.

"Is it pleasant to live on the top of the mountain?" asked her companion.

"Oh, yes, mademoiselle; only it is a little cold. And when you look out at night—in the moonlight—it frightens one—for all the house seems surrounded by a yellow mist which floats about and makes figures, and then it sweeps away, and you see the garden sharp and clear. It is the clouds, you know. Franz Gersbach has told me of his having been on the top of the Niessen one morning before sunrise, and while all the great mountains opposite—the Jungfrau, and the Mönch, and the Eiger, and all these—were still cold and dark, he saw Monte Rosa and Mont Blanc, away down in the south, with a pale pink flame on their peaks in the midst of the green sky. Here we have no snow on our mountains, except in the winter-time; and then some-

times the people up here have their supplies cut off for a long time."

There was a tall, fair-faced, sleepy-looking man standing at the door of the inn, with whom Grete shook hands. The giant blushed slightly, answered her questions in laconic monosyllables, and then led the way into the house, apparently relieved to be out of the observation of the two girls.

"It is the landlord's brother," said Grete, "and a friend of mine."

"You have a number of friends," said Annie Brunel, with a smile; "and they seem to be all big men. If you were as small as I am, one might account for your liking big men."

Grete Halm looked at her companion. There could be no doubt about the German girl being the taller and certainly the stouter of the two; and yet until that

moment she had fancied that Miss Brunel was ever so much taller than she.

"It is the manner of your walk, mademoiselle, and your figure—and perhaps the expression of your face—that make me think you tall. No, I see you are not tall."

For a moment Margarethe's soft brown eyes dwelt on her companion—perhaps with a touch of wistful, puzzled longing to know why grace of form should so touch our sympathies; then she turned to the large Heinrich Holzmann—whose big shoulders should have been more attractive to a girl's eye than another girl's waist—and said that the young English lady wished the best apartments in the house. Margarethe further gave him to understand that his guests would be very particular about their cookery; and, above all, that they would not submit to have but one fork and knife to attend them through four or five courses.

Heinrich said "Yaw" in a grave manner to all her directions, and begged her to tell the English lady that his brother, who spoke French, would be home next day.

"But the lady and her friend—who will be here presently—must not starve till to-morrow," said the practical Grete.

"Nein," said Heinrich, absently.

"I mean they must have dinner here, and you must look after it, Heinrich Holzmann."

"Ja, ja."

"You have plenty in the house?"

"Ja."

"The lady says that after the carriage arrives, you can have dinner prepared; that is, the lady and her friend at one table, and Hermann Löwe, the coachman, and I at another. Do you understand?"

"Freilich."

"If the girls want help, ask me."

"Danke schön, Grete."

"And as you don't seem to have anybody here, shall I take the lady upstairs and pick out what rooms she wants?"

"Yes, if that pleases you," said the fair-haired giant, and therewith he opened the door for Miss Brunel, and made her a grave bow as she went with Grete into the passage, and so up to the rooms above.

It was nearly half-an-hour afterwards that the carriage arrived, and Mrs. Christmas, with much excitement, caught Annie in her arms and kissed her, declaring she had never expected to see her again. The road they had come!—the precipices they had skirted, with the three horses slipping on the smooth rocks at the very brink!—the vehicle leaning over as if it were about to topple headlong down!—the jolting into deep ruts and over blocks of stone!

"I screamed," she said, "and insisted on

being helped out of the carriage; for they would have me sit still, declaring there was no danger. Danger!——"

And the little woman shivered.

"So you walked all the way?"

"Until we got down into the valley."

Grete and Hermann were invited to dine with the two ladies; and, in the evening, they all convoyed the young German girl down to the house of her friend.

For several days they remained on the Feldberg, beguiling the time as best they might. Mrs. Christmas had now quite recovered her normal condition of health and spirits, and laboured hard to discover why her companion was so preoccupied, restless, and absent in manner. Why, too, was this journey down through Switzerland being indefinitely postponed? Every morning it was——

"Miss Annie, do we start to-day?"

"Not to-day, mother. Let us have another day's quiet."

"You will kill yourself with dulness, Miss Annie. There is nothing for you to do."

"Let us climb to the top of the peak, and see the tower——"

"I have tried twice and failed. And if you persist in going up there alone, you will tumble down into that horrible lake you told me of."

"Then let us descend to the lake to-day, if you please."

She could not leave the neighbourhood. She lingered there, day after day, that she might have tidings from Schönstein. Two letters she had received from the Count told her nothing definite; they were very polite, grave, respectful communications, in which he hoped she would visit Schönstein again on her return. Hermann, on going back to

his master, had written to Grete Halm, and merely mentioned that the English gentleman was still in his room, and that the surgeon did not speak very confidently of the case.

This day, also, she prevailed on Mrs. Christmas to stay; and together, after breakfast, they set out in quest of the Feldsee, the small lake that lies deep down in the heart of the mountain. They were furnished with a few directions from Heinrich Holzman's brother; but as neither time nor direction was of much consequence to them, they plunged carelessly into the forest, and proceeded slowly to descend the side of the mountain. At last, they came upon a path which led down through the jumbled and picturesque confusion of shattered rock, smooth boulder, moss, fern, and herbage, that lay around the foot of the tall, resinous-smelling pines; and this track they leisurely

followed until, from the twilight of the trees, it led them out into the obscure daylight which dwelt over the gloomy tarn they sought.

Nothing could well be more lonely or melancholy than this dark and silent lake lying in its circular bed—evidently an extinct volcanic crater,—overshadowed by tall and perpendicular crags hemming it in on every side, and scarcely ever having a breath of wind to stir its leaden-like surface. The tall, thinly-clad rocks, rising to the circular breadth of white sky above, were faintly mirrored in the black water underneath; and the gloomy stillness of the quite motionless picture was not relieved by the least stir or sound of any living thing. This hideous hole, its surface nearly four thousand feet above the level of the sea, is of unknown depth: no wonder that the superstitious Schwarzwalders have legends about it, and

that the children tell you of the demon-deer that was wont to spring over the tall precipices above, and so lure on the unwary huntsman and his horse to destruction.

There was a boat lying moored in a creek at one corner of the lake, and of this Annie Brunel at once took possession. She insisted on Mrs. Christmas getting into it; and then, with a few strokes of the oars, she pulled out to the centre of the lake. Mrs. Christmas did not at all like the aspect of the place; and, if she had known that she was floating over an extinct volcano, she would probably have liked it less.

"It looks like a place for murders to be committed," she said.

When they had reached the centre of the dark water, Annie laid aside the oars and seated herself in the stern of the boat with her companion. There was no wind,

no current: the boat remained almost motionless.

The old woman took the young girl's hand, and said to her—

"Come now, Miss Annie, you must tell me what has been the matter with you lately — what has vexed you — or what troubles you."

"I have been thinking of returning to England," she said, absently.

"Why should that trouble you?"

"I am afraid of going back."

"Bah! I have no patience with you. You are as much a child as ever—as when you used to whimper in a make-believe way, and cause your mother to laugh and cry together over your natural turn for acting."

"My natural turn for acting is going—is nearly gone," said she, with a smile; "and that is what I am afraid about. I am beginning to fear a lot of faces."

"Then *why* will you remain in such a dreadfully lonely place as this mountain inn? That it is which breeds strange fancies in you, my girl, don't doubt of it. Afraid of faces! Didn't you use to tell me that you were never conscious of seeing a face at all when you were on the stage?"

"I may have said so," she replied, musingly. "I don't think I ever did see faces — except as vague orange-coloured lamps in a sort of ruddy darkness—over the blaze of the footlights, you know. Certainly I never thought of them, nor heeded them. When I went off, and heard the noise of their hands and feet, it seemed like the sound of some machine with which I had no concern. I don't think I ever feared an audience in my life. My mother used to be my audience, as she stood in the wings and looked at me with the half-smile and kindly eyes I remember so well; and then I

used to try to please you, you know, and never succeeded, as you also know, Lady Jane; and lately I have not thought of pleasing anybody, but of satisfying a sort of delirium that came over me."

"You never pleased me! You wicked creature! If I were blind and came into a theatre where I heard you playing your 'Juliet,' my eyes would open of their own accord."

"That time has passed over, Lady Jane. I am afraid of going to England. I should see all the faces now, and wonder what the people were saying of my hands outstretched, or of my kneeling posture, or of my elocution. I feel that if I were to get up just now, in this boat, and speak two sentences"——

"You would have us both laughing. But did you ever try before, my dear, to act to a scene? You might as well try to

speak to an empty theatre as to that horrible loneliness over there. It was Mr. Bridges, the stage-manager at N——, if you remember, Miss Annie, who used to rehearse in the morning his speech before the curtain—used to wave his hand and smile to the empty benches, and then bow himself out backward. But at night, when the people were there, he always forgot the smile and the wave of the hand, and mumbled like a schoolboy. And as for your not being able to act when you hear the stir of a crowded house on the other side of the curtain, and know there are a dozen bouquets waiting for you in the boxes, why it's nonsense, my dear."

"I am afraid of it none the less, mother, and I shall dread putting myself to the test."

"All the result of this living out of the world," said Mrs. Christmas, dogmatically.

"Say, shall we start to-morrow morning, Miss Annie?"

"Yes."

When they returned to the inn there was a letter from Schönstein awaiting Miss Brunel. She knew from the peculiar handwriting who had sent it, and opened it joyfully, knowing that he was at least well enough to write. These were the words:—

"Schönstein, Thursday.

"My dear Miss Brunel,—Ever since you left I have bitterly reproached myself for having given you so much annoyance and trouble. I hear that you are living, without amusement or companions, in the Feldberg Inn. May I beg of you to return here, adding the assurance that you will not be troubled by my presence in any way whatever? Whether you do or not, I cannot permit you to leave without bidding

you good-bye—especially as we may not see each other in England—and so, if you will forgive me this once, I propose to cross over to the Feldberg to-morrow and visit you," &c. &c.

She read no more; the cramped left-hand writing had told her enough. She hurriedly wrote a reply, peremptorily forbidding him to be at the trouble and danger of such an expedition; and added that, before he could possibly be at the Feldberg, she would be on her way to Freiburg and Basle. Then she called the elder Holzmann, desired him to get a messenger to take over this letter to Schönstein that day, and informed him that on the next morning she and her companion would set out for the south.

It was a point of maidenly honour with her that she should go away with her sad secret her own; and who could tell what

disclosure might happen, were she to see him suffering from the effects of the wound, entreating her to stay, and with his own love for her speaking in his eyes? He was a man, and it did not matter; as for her, she closed this fatal tenderness in her heart, and would fain have deceived herself into denying its existence. Truth to say, she felt a touch of shame at her own weakness; was dimly conscious that her virginal purity of soul was tainted by a passion which she dreamed was a guilty one; and knew that her punishment lay in the loss of that innocent gaiety and thoughtlessness which had hitherto made her life so pleasant.

"We may not see each other in England," she said to herself, gazing at the crooked and trembling lines on the paper. "Not in England, nor elsewhere, will be my constant prayer so long as I live."

So they left the gloomy mountain, and, passing through the Höllenthal once more, reached Freiburg; and from thence, by easy stages, they made the round of the Swiss lakes until, as fate would have it, they came to Thun. There they rested for a day or two, preparatory to their undertaking the voyage to England.

Here a strange incident befel Annie Brunel. Their first walk lay along the shore of the lake; and no sooner had they left the side of the rapid, bright-green Aar, than Mrs. Christmas noticed a strange, intense look of wonder settling over her companion's face. Wistfully, and yet curiously, the dark-grey eyes dwelt on the expanding lake, on the long, curving bays, on the sunlit mountains opposite, and on the far-off snow-peaks of the Bernese Alps.

"I have seen all this in a dream," she said.

"Or in a picture," suggested Mrs. Christmas.

"It is more than a dream or a picture," she continued, in a half-frightened way, as they walked along. "I know the place—I know it—the shore over there—the village down yonder at the point, and the smoke hanging over the trees;—I am getting quite giddy with—remembering——"

"My dear!" said Mrs. Christmas.

Her companion was now quite pale, and stood fixed to the spot, looking over the long scene in front of her with a wild stare. Then she turned round, as if almost in fear, and no sooner had she done so than she uttered a slight cry and seemed ready to sink to the ground.

"I knew it! I knew it!" she said. "I knew the house was there before I turned my head."

She looked up at the handsome building on the plateau above as if it were some horrible thing come to torture her. It was only the house in which Harry Ormond had bidden her mother farewell.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN ENGLAND.

MR. MELTON was overjoyed to see Annie Brunel in London again. He had spent half his fortune in beautifying his theatre, in getting up elaborate scenery for the new piece with which he was to welcome the return to town of his patrons, and in providing costly properties. So long as the heroine of the piece was wandering among the mountains of the Schwarzwald, it was impossible that the manager's mind could be well at ease.

"You shall come round now, and see

what we have done for you, and give us your opinion," said he, politely.

Indeed, he would like to have kissed her just then, in a fatherly way, to show how delighted he was to have her back again. He saw pictures of overflowing audiences before his mind as he looked on the quiet little figure before him, on the dark face, and the large, grave eyes.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. A tolerably clear light fell upon the stage, a duskier twilight hung over the rows of empty benches in the pit, and the gloomy darkness behind the galleries was here and there lit up by a solitary lamp. One or two gilders were still at work on the front of the dress-circle; overhead an echoing clang of hammer and nail told that carpenters were busy; and a vague shouting from the dusky region of the "flies" revealed the presence of human beings in those dim

Olympian heights. Everywhere, as usual, the smell of escaped gas; here and there an odour of size or paint.

As they descended from the dark corridor behind the dress-circle into the wings, a mass of millinery ran full tilt against Mr. Melton, and then started back with a slight cry and a giggle.

"God bless my soul!" said the manager, piously, although that was not the part of his body which had suffered.

The next moment Miss Featherstone had thrown her arms around Annie Brunel's neck and was kissing her and calling her "my dear" with that profusion of sentiment which most actresses love to scatter over the object, *pro tem.*, of their affection. Miss Featherstone was attired in a green silk dress—in many a love scene had *that* rather dingy piece of costume figured, on the stage and elsewhere—a blue cloth jacket, a white

hat with a scarlet feather, and yellow gloves. During this outburst of emotion, Mr. Melton had caught sight of a young gentleman—to whom he gave thirty shillings a week in order that he might dress as a gentleman should, and always have a good hat to keep on his head while walking about in a drawing-room—who had been in pursuit of Miss Featherstone, and now sneaked away in another direction.

"And so you've come back, my dear, and none of the German princes have run away with you! And how well you look—I declare I'm quite ashamed of myself when I see the colour in your cheeks; but what with rehearsals, you know, my dear, and other troubles——"

She heaved a pretty and touching sigh. She intimated that these quarrels with the young gentleman who escorted her to and from the stage-door—quarrels which came

off at a rate of about seven per week—were disturbing the serenity of her mind so far as to compel her to assist nature with violet-powder and rouge.

"Do you know, my dear," she said, in a whisper that sent Mr. Melton away on his own business, "he swears he will forsake me for ever if I accept a part in which I must wear tights. How can I help it, my dear? What is a poor girl to do?"

"Wear trousers," said Annie Brunel, with a smile.

"Nothing will please him. He would have all my comic parts played in a train half a mile long. At last I told him he had better go and help my mother to cut my skirts and petticoats of a proper length; and he pretended to be deeply hurt, and I haven't seen him since."

Then she tossed her wilful little head with an air of defiance.

"He will write to me before I write to him."

"It is too cruel of you," said her companion.

"Yes, my dear, you may laugh; but you have no burlesque parts to play. And you have nobody sitting in the stalls watching your every movement, and keeping you in a fright about what he is thinking of you."

"No," said Annie Brunel, rather absently, "I have nobody to watch me like that. If I had, I should not be able to go upon the stage, I think."

"And the bitter things he says about the profession—and particularly about Mr. Gannet, and Mr. Marks, and Mr. Jobson—all because they are young men, and he fancies they may be so polite as to lift a glove for me if I let it fall. You know, my dear, that *I* don't encourage them. If

there's any fun at rehearsal, you know that *I* don't begin it."

"When we met you just now——"

"That was only some of Mr. Murphy's nonsense. Oh, I declare to you, no one knows what I have suffered. The other evening, when he and I got into a cab, he glared at the man who opened the door for us. And the fuss he makes about cosmetique and bismuth is something dreadful."

"He must be a monster."

There now ensued a little fragment of thorough comedy. For a moment the elderly young lady, who had been assuming throughout the tone of a spoiled child, stood irresolute. There was a petulance on her face, and she had half a mind to go away in high dudgeon from one who was evidently laughing at her. Then through this petulance there broke a sort of knowing

smile, while a glimmer of mischievous intelligence appeared in her eyes; and then, with an unaffected comical giggle, she once more threw her arms round Annie Brunel's neck and kissed her.

"I'm very wicked, I know," she said, with a shrug of the shoulders, "but I can't help it. What's bred in the bone, you know. And it's all the men's fault, for they keep teasing one so. As for *him*, if he writes to me, and makes an apology, and promises to be a good boy, I'll make friends with him. And I'll be very good myself — for a week."

It was with a cold inward shiver that Annie Brunel stepped out upon the stage and looked round the empty theatre. She tried to imagine it full of people, and yellow light, and stir, and she knew within herself she dared not venture before them. Even without that solitary pair of eyes

watching her movements, and without the consciousness that she might be producing a strong impression, for good or evil, on one particular person whose estimation she desired, she trembled to think of the full house, and the rows of faces, and her own individual weakness.

"What do you think of the decorations, Miss Brunel?" said Mr. Melton coming up.

"They are very pretty," she said, mechanically.

"With your 'Rosalind,' the theatre should draw all London to it."

"It is 'Rosalind' you mean to play?" she asked, scarcely knowing what she said.

"Certainly," replied the manager, with astonishment. Don't you remember our agreement? If you turn round, you will see the new forest-scene Mr. Gannet has

painted; perhaps it may remind you of something in the Black Forest."

For a moment or two she glanced over the great breadth of canvas, covered with gnarled oaks, impossible brushwood, and a broad, smooth stream. With a short "No, it is not like the Black Forest," she turned away again.

"Miss Featherstone will play 'Celia;' and you know there is not a 'Touchstone' in the world to come near Bromley's. Mrs Wilkes refuses to play 'Audrey,' luckily, and Miss Alford will play it a deal better. I have had several rehearsals, everybody is declared letter-perfect; and we only want you to put the keystone to the arch, as one might say."

She turned quickly round and said to him—

"If I were at the last moment prevented from playing in the piece, could Miss

Featherstone take 'Rosalind,' and some one else play 'Celia?' "

"What do you mean, my dear Miss Brunel?" said the manager, aghast. "You frighten me, I assure you. I calculated upon you; and after all this expense, and your agreement, and——"

"Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Melton," she said, quietly. "I mean to play the part so as to give every satisfaction both to you and myself, if I can. I only asked in the event of any accident."

"Come," said he, kindly, "I can't have you talk in that strain, with such a prospect before us. Why, we are going to set all London, as well as the Thames, on fire, and have the prices of the stalls going at a hundred per cent. premium. An accident! Bah! I wish Count Schönstein were here to laugh the notion out of your head."

So it was, therefore, that the play was put

in full rehearsal for several days, and Mr. Melton looked forward hopefully to the success of his new venture. Sometimes he was a little disquieted by the remembrance of Miss Brunel's singular question; but he strove to banish it from his mind. He relied upon his new scenery and decorations, and upon Annie Brunel; the former were safe, and he would take care to secure the latter.

The gentlemen of the press had been good enough to mention the proposed revival in terms of generous anticipation. Altogether, Mr. Melton had every reason to hope for the best.

Occasionally he observed an unusual constraint in the manner of his chief favourite, and sometimes a listless indifference to what was going on around her. Once or twice he had caught her standing idly behind the footlights, gazing into the empty theatre with a vague earnestness which revealed some in-

ward purpose. He still trusted that all would go well; and yet he confessed to himself that there was something about the young actress's manner that he had never noticed before, and which he could not at all understand.

Mrs. Christmas seemed to share with him this uneasy feeling. He knew that the old lady was now in the habit of lecturing her pupil in a derisive way, as if trying to banish some absurd notion from her mind; and whenever he approached, Mrs. Christmas became silent.

For the first time during their long companionship Mrs. Christmas found her young friend incomprehensibly obstinate, not to say intractable. Night and day she strove to convince her that in anticipating nervousness and failure, she was rendering both inevitable; and yet she could not, by all her arguments

and entreaties, remove this gloomy apprehension.

"I cannot explain the feeling," was the constant reply. "I only know it is there."

"But you, of all people, Miss Annie! Girls who have suddenly come to try the stage get fits of stage-fright naturally; but people who are born and bred to it, who have been on the stage since their childhood——"

"Why should you vex yourself, mother? I have no dread of stage-fright. I shall be as cool as I am now. Don't expect that I shall blunder in my part, or make mistakes otherwise—that is not what I mean. What I fear is, that the moment I go upon the stage, and see the men and women all around me, I shall feel that I am just like one of them, only a little lower in having to amuse them. I shall feel as if I ought

to be ashamed of myself in imitating the real emotions of life."

"You never had any of those fantastic notions before. Didn't you use to pride yourself on your indifference to the people?"

"I *used* to."

"What has changed you?"

"My growing older," she replied, with a sad smile. "I begin to feel as if those things that make up acting had become part of my own life now, and that I had no business to burlesque them any more on the stage. I begin to wonder what the people will think of my lending myself to a series of tricks."

And here she fell into a reverie, which Mrs. Christmas saw it was useless to interrupt. The worthy old woman was sorely puzzled and grieved by the apostasy of her most promising pupil, and ceased not to

speculate on what subtle poison had been allowed to creep into her mind.

Meanwhile the opening night had arrived. People had come back from the moors and Mont Blanc, and every place in the theatre had been taken. Mr. Melton already enjoyed his triumph by anticipation, and tried every means of keeping up Annie Brunel's spirits. She was bound to achieve the most brilliant of all her successes, as he confidently told her.

CHAPTER IX.

ROSALIND.

"*AH, mon bon petit public*, be kind to my leetel child!" says Achille Talma Dufard, when his daughter is about to go on the stage for the first time. The words were in the heart, if not on the lips, of Mrs. Christmas, as the kindly old woman busied herself in Annie Brunel's dressing-room, and prepared her favourite for the coming crisis. She had a vague presentiment that it was to be a crisis, though she did not know why.

By the time the inevitable farce was over, the house was full. Miss Featherstone, rushing downstairs to change her costume

of a barmaid for that of 'Celia,' brought word that all the critics were present, that Royalty was expected, and that her own particular young gentleman had laughed so heartily at the farce that she was sure he was in a good humour, and inclined to let bygones be bygones.

"So you must cheer up," said Mrs. Christmas, blithely, when Nelly had gone; "you must cheer up, and do great things, my dear."

"Am I not sufficiently cheerful, Lady Jane?"

"Cheerful? Cheerful? Yes, perhaps cheerful. But you must forget all you have been saying about the people, and mind only your character, and put fire and spirit into it. Make them forget who *you* are, my dear, and then you'll only think of yourself as 'Rosalind.' Isn't your first cue '*Be merry*'?"

"Then I will be merry, mother, or anything else you wish. So don't vex your poor little head about me. I shall add a grey hair to it if you bother yourself so much."

"You would find it hard to change it now, unless you changed it to black," said Lady Jane.

When 'Rosalind' and 'Celia' together appeared on the stage, a long and hearty welcome was given forth from every part of the house. Mr. Melton was standing in the wings with Mrs. Christmas, and his dry grey face brightened up with pleasure.

"They have not forgotten her, have they?" he said, triumphantly.

"How could they?" was the natural response.

From that moment the old woman's eyes never left the form of her scholar, during the progress of the play. Keenly and

narrowly she watched the expression of her face, her manner of acting, the subtle harmony of word and gesture which, in careful keeping, make the part of 'Rosalind' an artistic wonder. And the more narrowly she studied her pupil's performance, the more she convinced herself that there was nothing to be found fault with. The timid pleasantries, the tender sadness, the coy love advances, tempered and beautified by that unconscious halo of modesty and virgin grace which surrounds the gentlest of all Shakspeare's heroines, were there, before her eyes, and she was forced to say to herself that no 'Rosalind' could be more charming than this 'Rosalind.' She did not reflect that never before had she been constrained so to convince herself, and that never before had she been so anxious to know the effect on the audience.

That, so far as was yet appreciable, was

satisfactory. The mere charm of admirably artistic acting, combined with a graceful figure, and a pretty face, was enough to captivate any body of spectators. Mrs. Christmas, however, dared not confess to herself that they seemed to want that electric thrill of sympathy which had been wont to bring them and the young actress immediately *en rapport*. Once, only, did they in the first act, catch that swift contagion of delight which flashes through an audience bound by the master-spell of genius. It was where 'Rosalind,' having graced the victorious wrestler with a chain from her own neck, is about to go away with 'Celia,' and yet is loth to go without having had speech of the young man who has so awakened her interest. The half-interpreted longing, the hesitating glance, and maiden bashfulness with which she turned to him and said—

"Did you call, sir?—
Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown
More than your enemies,"

her eyes first seeking his face, and then being cast down, as the words became almost inaudible—provoked the house into a sudden tempest of applause which covered her disappearance from the scene. Mrs. Christmas caught her as she came off, and kissed her, with nervous tears in her eyes.

At the end of the first act, she was called before the curtain; any one calmly observing the house would have seen that it was not very enthusiastic, and that it fell to talking almost before she had passed behind the curtain at the opposite side. Then she went down to her dressing-room.

Mrs. Christmas welcomed her and complimented her with an emphasis which was a little forced and unnecessary. Annie Brunel said nothing, but stood and contem-

plated, with her straight-looking honest eyes, the poor little woman who was courageously trying to act her part naturally. Then she sate down.

"Do you think I did my best, mother?" she said. And again she fixed her large eyes, with a kind conciliation in them, on her aged friend.

"Of course——"

"And you were watching me, I think?"

"Yes."

"And the house?"

"A little," said Mrs. Christmas, rather nervously.

"Then you know," she said calmly, "that I have made a total failure, that the people think so, and that to-morrow every one, including the papers, will say so."

"My dear——!"

"Why should we not speak frankly, mother? I felt it within myself, and I saw

it in their faces. *And I knew it before I went on the stage.*"

"That is it! That has done it all!" exclaimed the old woman, inclined to wring her hands in despair and grief. "You convinced yourself that you were going to fail, and then, when you went on the stage, you lost command over yourself."

"Had I not command over myself?" the young girl asked, with a smile. "I had so great command of myself that I knew and was conscious of everything I did—the tiniest thing—and kept continually asking myself how it would impress the people. I was never in the least excited; had I been —but there is no use talking, Lady Jane. Help me to change my dress; I suppose I must go through with it."

So Mrs. Christmas officiated in place of Sarah, whom she always ordered out of the way on grand occasions; and, as she did so,

she still administered counsel and reproof, not having quite given up hope.

Two of the most distinguished of the critics met in the lobby leading to the stalls.

"A pity, is it not?" said one.

The other merely shrugged his shoulders.

The general run of the critics fancied that Annie Brunel had added another to her list of brilliant successes, and were already shaping in their brain elaborate sentences overflowing with adjectives.

Lord Weyminster, whom people considered to have a share in the proprietary of the theatre, went behind the scenes and met Mr. Melton.

"This wont do, my boy," he said.

"Do you think not?" said the manager, anxiously. "They received her very warmly."

"They received Miss Brunel warmly, but not her 'Rosalind,'"

"What's to be done?"

"Change the piece."

"I can't. Perhaps it was only a temporary indisposition."

"Perhaps," said his lordship, carelessly. "I never saw such a difference in the acting of any woman. Formerly she was full of fire; to-night she was wooden — pretty enough, and proper enough, but wooden."

Further consolation or advice Mr. Melton could not get out of his patron. In despair, he said that his lordship was exaggerating a temporary constraint on the part of the young actress, and that the succeeding scenes would bring her out in full force.

The wood scene was of course charming. Miss Featherstone's young gentleman, sitting in the stalls, surrendered himself to the delicious intoxication of the moment ('Celia,' it will be remembered, wears long petticoats), and wondered whether he could

write a poem on the forest of Ardennes. He was in that fond period of existence when the odour of escaped gas, anywhere, at once awoke for him visions of green-wood scenery and romantic love-affairs; and when the perfume of cold cream conjured up the warm touch of a certain tender cheek—for Miss Featherstone, when in a hurry to get home from the theatre, occasionally left her face unwashed.

The people never lost interest in the play. Indeed, being Londoners, they were sufficiently glad to see any character played with careful artistic propriety, and it was only as an afterthought that they missed the old thrill of Annie Brunel's acting. It could always be said of the part that it was gracefully and tenderly done, void of coarse comedy and of claptrap effects. It struck a certain low and chastened key of sweetness and harmony that partially atoned for

the absence of more daring and thrilling chords.

And yet Annie Brunel went home sick at heart. The loss of popular favour did not trouble her; for had not the people been remarkably kind, and even enthusiastic, in their final call? It was the certain consciousness that the old power had passed away from her for ever—or rather, that the intensity and emotional abandonment of her artistic nature had been sucked into her own personal nature, and was never more to be separately exhibited as a beautiful and wonderful human product.

"Mother, I am tired of acting," she said. "It has been weighing upon me ever so long; but I thought I ought to give myself one more chance, and see if the presence of a big audience would not remove my sickness. No; it has not. Everything I had anticipated occurred. I was not frightened;

but I knew that all the people were there, and that I could not command them. I was not 'Rosalind' either to them or to myself; and it was not 'Rosalind' whom they applauded. The noise they made seemed to me to have a tone of pity in it, as if they were trying to deceive me into thinking well of the part."

All this she said quietly and frankly; and Mrs. Christmas sate stunned and silent. It seemed to the old woman that some terrible calamity had occurred. She could not follow the subtle sympathies and distinctions of which the young actress spoke: she knew only that something had happened to destroy the old familiar compact between them, and that the future was full of a gloomy uncertainty.

"I don't know what to say, Miss Annie. You know best what your feelings are. I

know there's something wrong somewhere——"

"Don't talk so mournfully," she said. "If I don't act any more we shall find something else to keep us out of starvation."

"If you don't act any more!" said the old woman, in a bewildered way. "If you don't act any more! Tell me, Miss Annie, what you mean. You're not serious? You don't mean that because your 'Rosalind' mayn't have gone off pretty well, you intend to give up the stage altogether—at your time of life—with your prospects—my darling, tell me what you mean?"

She went over and took her companion's two hands in her own.

"Why, mother, you tremble as if you expected some terrible misfortune to happen to us. You will make me as nervous as yourself if you don't collect yourself. You have not been prepared for it as I have been.

I have known for some time that I should not be able to act when I returned to London——"

With a slight scream, she started up and caught her friend, who was tottering and like to fall, in her arms. The old woman had been unable to receive this intelligence all at once. It was too appalling and too sudden; and when at last some intimation of it came home to her mind, she reeled under the shock. She uttered some incoherent words—"*my charge of you*," "*your mother*," "*the future*"—and then she sank quite insensible upon the sofa to which Annie Brunel had half carried her.

CHAPTER X.

HOME AGAIN.

COUNT SCHÖNSTEIN was in love. His ponderous hilarity had quite gone out of him. After Miss Brunel's departure, he moved about the house alone and disconsolate; he was querulous about his meals; he forgot to tell lies about the price of his wines. He ceased to joke about marriage; he became wonderfully polite to the people about him, and above all to Will Anerley; and every evening after dinner he was accustomed to sit and smoke silently in his chair, going over in his mind all the incidents of Annie Brunel's

visit, and hoping that nothing had occurred to offend her.

Sometimes, in a fit of passionate longing, he wished he was again a tea-dealer and she the daughter of one of his clerks. He grew sick of his ambitious schemes; inwardly cursed the aristocracy of this and every other country; and prayed for some humble cottage, with Annie Brunel for his wife, and with nothing for himself to do but sit and smoke, and watch the grape-clusters over the verandah.

Twenty years before he had been afflicted by the same visions. They did not alter much his course of life then; nor did he permit them to move him much now—except after dinner, when most people become generously impulsive and talkative. In one of these moods he confessed to Will the passion which disturbed his repose.

Will stared at him, for the mere thought

of such a thing seemed to him a sort of sacrilege; but the next moment he asked himself what right *he* had to resent the Count's affection for Annie Brunel as an insult, and then he was silent.

"Tell me, have I a chance?" said the Count.

"How can I tell you?" he replied.

"You were very friendly with her. You do not imagine there is anybody else in the young lady's graces?"

"I don't know of any one whom Miss Brunel is likely to marry; but, as I say, how can I tell?"

"You imagine I have a fair field?" asked the Count, rather timidly.

"Oh, yes!" said Will, with a laugh, in which there was just a touch of bitterness. "But that is not the way you used to talk about women, and marriage, and so forth. Do you remember how you gloated over

the saying of that newspaper man who was at the 'Juliet' supper—about being 'sewn up in a theological sack with a partner for life?' I suppose you were only whistling in the dark, to scare the ghosts away, and now——"

There was no need to complete the sentence. The doleful look on the Count's rubicund face told its own tale. He shook his head, rather sadly, and contemplatively stirred his Moselle with a bit of biscuit.

"It's time a man like me was married. I have plenty of money to give my wife her own way: we shan't quarrel. There's that big house standing empty; you can't expect people to come and visit you, if you've nobody to receive them. Look how perfectly Miss Brunel could do that. Look at the grace of her demeanour, and her courtesy, and all that: why, though she's ever so little a thing, she looks like an

empress when she comes into a room. I never could get elsewhere such a wife as she would make."

"Doubtless not; but the point is to get her," said Will, almost defiantly—he did not know whether to laugh at or be indignant with the Count's cool assumption.

"I tell you I would marry her if she was nothing but what she is ——" the Count said, vehemently, and then he suddenly paused, with a look of frightened embarrassment on his face.

"How could she be anything else than what she is?" asked Will, carelessly: he had not observed the Count's trepidation.

"Oh—well—ah—if she were nothing more than an ordinary actress, without the manners of a lady, I should be inclined to marry her, on account of her—her sweetness of disposition, you know."

"What magnanimity!" said Will.

"Laugh as you please," said the Count, with a touch of offended dignity, "there are few men in my position would marry an actress. If I *should* marry Miss Brunel, I should consider that while she did me a favour I paid her quite as great a compliment. Look at the estimation in which actresses are held. Look at those women of the —— theatre; at Miss ——, and Miss ——, and Miss ——. Don't the public know all about them? And the public wont stop to pick out one respectable actress from the lot, and be just to her. They all suffer for the sins of the majority; and any actress, whatever may be her personal character, ought to know that she lies under the ban of social suspicion, and——"

"Excuse my interrupting you. But you needn't seek to lower Miss Brunel in *my* opinion: I am not going to marry her.

And I should advise you not to attempt to lower her in her own opinion, if you mean to remain friends with her. You can't humble a woman into accepting you; you *may* flatter her into accepting you. If a woman does not think she is conferring a favour in marrying you, she wont at all—that is, if she is the sort of woman any man would care to marry."

"Leave that to me, my boy, leave that to me," said the Count, with a superb smile. "I rather fancy, if flattery is to win the day, that I shall not be far behind."

"And yet I heard you one evening say to Nelly Featherstone that 'all pretty women were idiots.' How could any woman help being offended by such a remark?"

"Why, don't you see, you greenhorn, that Nelly isn't pretty——"

"And you as good as told her so," said Will. "Besides, Nelly, like every other

woman, fancies she is pretty in a certain way, and would rather that you had informed her of her idiotcy than of her plainness."

The Count blushed deeply. In making the remark to Miss Featherstone, he had imagined he was exhibiting a most remarkable and subtle knowledge of human weakness; and hoped to console her for the shape of her nose by sneering at the stupidity of prettier women. But the Count was a rich man, and a great favourite of Mr. Melton; and Nelly, being a prudent young woman, pocketed the affront.

A variety of circumstances now transpired to hasten the return of both Will and the Count to England. The former could do scarcely anything to the business for which he had come, through his inability to use his right arm. There were, besides, certain growing symptoms of irritation in the

wounds which he had fancied were slowly healing, which made him anxious to consult some experienced English surgeon. Such were his ostensible reasons.

Under these circumstances, what pleasure could the Count have in remaining in Schönstein alone? He preferred to have Will's company on the homeward journey; and besides, he was personally interested in learning whether the injuries his friend had suffered were likely to become more dangerous. Such were *his* ostensible reasons.

But the crowning thought of both of them, as they turned their back upon Schönstein, was—"I shall soon see Annie Brunel."

As they passed through the village, Margarethe Halm came out from under her father's door, and the driver stopped the carriage.

"You will see the young English lady

when you return home?" said Grete to Will, with a blush on her pretty brown face.

"And if I do?"

"Will you give her this little parcel: it is my work."

With that she slipped the parcel into his hand. At this moment Hans Halm came forward and bade both the gentlemen good-bye; and in that moment Grete, unnoticed, timidly handed up to Hermann, who was seated beside the driver, another little parcel. There was a slight quivering of the lips as she did so; and then she turned away, and went up to her own room, and threw herself, sobbing, on the bed in quite a passion of grief, not daring to look after the carriage as it rolled away into the forest.

Hermann stealthily opened the packet, and found therein a little gilt *Gebetbuch*, with coloured pictures of the saints through-

out it, and a little inscription in front in Grete's handwriting. Franz Gersbach, having been over at Donaueschingen, had secretly bought the tiny prayer-book for her; and he knew all the time for whom it was intended.

"She is a good girl," said Hermann, "and a good girl makes a good wife. I will go once more to England, but never after that—no, not if I had seven hundred Counts for my master."

They stopped a day at Strasbourg, and there they found a lot of English newspapers of recent date.

"Look what the people are saying of Miss Brunel!" said Will, utterly confounded by the tone in which the journals spoke of 'Rosalind.'

The Count took up paper after paper, and eagerly scanned such notices of the pieces as he could find.

"They are not very enthusiastic," said he; "but they are really most complimentary——"

"Complimentary? Yes; but only to Miss Brunel, not to 'Rosalind.' Don't you see in every one of them how the writer, wishing to speak as highly as possible of her, scarcely knows how to throw cold water on the play? And yet cold water is thrown abundantly. The unanimity of these critiques simply says this—that Miss Brunel's 'Rosalind' is a failure."

"How will she bear it?" said the Count.

"She will bear it with the self-possession and sweetness that always cling to her."

For a moment he thought of an old simile of his: of her being like an Æolian harp, which, struck harshly or softly, by the north wind or the gentle south, could only breathe harmony in return. Would

that fine perfection of composure still remain with her, now that her generous artistic aspirations seemed to have been crushed in some way? He knew himself—for the divine light of her face in certain moments had taught him—that there is no joy upon earth to be compared with the joy of artistic creation. He could imagine, then, that the greatest possible misery is that which results from strong desire and impotent faculty.

"It is 'Rosalind' that is wrong, not she," he said. "Or she may be suffering from some indisposition—at any rate, they may spare their half-concealed compassion. Let her get a part to suit her—and then!"

He was not quite satisfied. How was it that none of the critics—and some of them were men of the true critical, sensitive temperament, quick to discern the subtle personal relations existing between an artist

and his art—dwelt upon the point that the part was obviously unsuited to her? Indeed, did not every one who had seen her in divers parts know that there were few parts which were so obviously suited to her?

"I know what it is!" said the Count. "There aren't enough people returned to town to fill the theatre, and she has been disheartened." And he already had some recklessly extravagant idea of filling the house with "paper" at his own expense.

"But there you read that the theatre was crammed," said Will.

"True," said the Count, gravely. "I hope there's nobody whom she has refused to see, or something like that, has been bribing all the papers out of spite?"

"They do that only in French plays," said Will. "I should think it more likely that the girl has been put out of sorts by

some private affliction. We shall see when we get home."

Then he reflected with a bitter pang that now he was debarred from ever approaching that too dear friend of his, and asking about her welfare. Whatever she might be suffering, through private sorrow or public neglect, he could no longer go forward and offer a comforting hand and a comforting word. When he thought that this privilege was now monopolized by the big, well-meaning, blundering Count, he was like to break his own resolve and vow to go straight to her the moment his feet touched English soil.

They crossed the Channel during the day; when they arrived in London, towards the evening, Will drove straight to his chambers, and the Count went home.

"You wont go down to St. Mary-Kirby," the latter had said, "to see that charming

little Dove? What a devilish fine woman she'll make!—you ought to consider yourself a happy fellow."

"It is too late," said Will, "to go down to-night. Besides, they don't expect me until to-morrow."

So he went to his lodgings; and there, having changed his dress, he found himself with the evening before him. He walked round to his club, read one or two letters that awaited him, went up to the smoking-room and found not a human being in the place—nothing but empty easy-chairs, chess-board tables, dishevelled magazines, and a prevailing odour of stale cigars—and then he went out and proceeded in the direction of the theatre in which Annie Brunel was at that moment playing. That goal had been uppermost in his thoughts ever since he left Calais pier in the morning.

The tall, pale, muscular man—and people

noticed that he had his right arm in a sling—who now paid his four or five shillings, walked upstairs, and slunk into the back seat of the dress-circle, was as nervous and as much afraid of being seen as a schoolboy thieving fruit. Perhaps it was the dread of seeing, as much as the fear of being seen, that made his heart beat; perhaps it was only expectation; but he bethought himself that in the twilight of the back seats of the circle his figure would be too dusky to be recognised, especially by one who had to look—if she looked at all—over the strong glare of the footlights.

The act drop was down when he entered—the orchestra playing the last instalment of Offenbach's confectionery music. The whole house was in the act of regarding two young ladies, dressed as little as possible in white silk, with wonderful complexions, towers of golden hair on their heads, and on

their faces an assumed unconsciousness of being stared at, who occupied a box by themselves. The elder of them had really beautiful features of an old French type—the forehead low and narrow, the eyelids heavy, the eyes large, languid, melancholy, the nose thin and a little *retroussée*, the mouth small, the lips thin and rather sad, the cheeks blanched and a trifle sunken, the line of the chin and neck magnificent. The beautiful, sad woman sate and stared wistfully at the glare of the gas; sometimes smiling, in a cold way, to her companion, a plump, commonplace beauty of a coarse English type, who had far too much white on her forehead and neck. Together, however, they seemed to make a sufficiently pretty picture to provoke that stolid British gaze which has something of the idiot but more of the animal in it.

When the curtain rose again the specta-

tors found themselves in Arden forest, with the Duke and his lords before them; and they listened to the talk of these poor actors as though they heard some creatures out of the other world converse. But from Will Anerley all the possibility of this generous delusion had fled. He shrank back, lest some of the men might have recognised him, and might carry the intelligence of his presence to Annie Brunel. Perhaps the Duke had just spoken to her; perhaps she was then looking on the scene from the wings. It was no longer Arden forest to him. The perspective of the stream and of the avenues of the trees vanished, and he saw only a stained breadth of canvas that hid *her* from his sight. Was she walking behind that screen? Could the actors on the stage see her in one of the entrances? And was it not a monstrous and inconceivable thing that these poor, wretched, unambitious, and

not very clean-shaven men were breathing the same atmosphere with her, that they sometimes touched her dress in passing, that her soft dark eyes regarded them?

You know that 'Rosalind' comes into this forest of Arden weary, dispirited, almost broken-hearted, in company with the gentle 'Celia' and the friendly 'Touchstone.' As the moment approached for her entrance, Anerley's breath came and went all the quicker. Was she not now just behind that board or screen? What was the expression of her face; and how had she borne up against the dull welcome that awaited her in England? He thought he should see only 'Rosalind' when she came upon the stage—that Annie Brunel might now be standing in the wings, but that 'Rosalind' only would appear before him.

He never saw 'Rosalind' at all. He suddenly became conscious that Annie

Brunel—the intimate companion who had sate beside him in long railway-journeys, who had taken breakfast with him, and played cards with him in the evening—had come out before all these people to amuse or interest them; and that the coarse, and stupid, and vicious, and offensive faces that had been staring a few minutes ago at the two creatures in white silk were now staring in the same manner at her—at her who was his near friend. A wonderful new throb went through his heart at that thought—a throb that reddened his pale cheek. He saw no more of 'Rosalind,' nor of Annie Brunel either. He watched only the people's faces—watched them with eyes that had no pleasant light in them. Who were these people, that they dared to examine her critically, that they presumed to look on her with interest, that they had the unfathomable audacity to look at all? He could not

see the costermongers in the gallery; but he saw the dress-coated publicans and grocers around him, and he regarded their stupidly delighted features with a savage scorn. This spasm of ungovernable hatred for the stolid, good-hearted, incomprehensible British tradesman was not the result of intellectual pride; but the consequence of a far more powerful passion. How many years was it since Harry Ormond had sate in his box, and glared with a bitter fury upon the people who dared to admire and applaud Annie Brunel's mother?

In especial there were two men, occupying a box by themselves, against whom he was particularly vengeful. As he afterwards learned from Mr. Melton, they were the promoters of a company which sold the best port, sherry, champagne, hock, burgundy, and claret at a uniform rate of ten shillings a dozen; and, in respect of their long ad-

vertisements, occasionally got a box for nothing through this or that newspaper. They were never known to drink their own wines; but they were partial to the gin of the refreshment-room; and, after having drunk a sufficient quantity of that delicious and cooling beverage, they grew rather demonstrative. Your honest cad watches a play attentively; the histrionic cad assumes the part of those florid-faced gentlemen—mostly officers—who come down to a theatre after dinner and laugh and joke during the progress of the piece, with their backs turned on the performers. A gentleman who has little brains, much loquacity, and an extra bottle of claret, is bad enough; but the half-tipsy cad who imitates him is immeasurably worse. The two men in question, wishing to be considered "d—d aristocratic," talked so as to be heard across the theatre, ogled the women with their

borrowed opera-glasses instead of looking at the play, and burst forth with laughter at the "sentimental" parts. It was altogether an inspiriting exhibition, which one never sees out of England.

And the gentle 'Rosalind,' too, was conscious that these men were looking at her. How could it be Arden forest to her—how could she be 'Rosalind' at all—if she was aware of the presence of such people, if she feared their inattention, and shrank from their laugh?

"What the papers have said about her is right," said Will to himself. "Something must have happened to dispirit her or upset her, and she seems not to care much about the part."

The charm of her acting was there—one could sit and watch with an extreme delight the artistic manipulation of those means which are obviously at the actor's hand—

but there was a subtle something wanting in the play. It was pretty and interesting while it lasted; but one could have permitted it to drop at any moment without regret.

There is, as everybody knows, a charming scene in the drama, in which 'Rosalind,' disguised as a youth, coaxes 'Orlando' to reveal all his love for her. There is in it every variety of coy bashfulness, and wayward fun, and half-suggested tenderness which an author could conceive or the most accomplished actress desire to represent. When 'Orlando' wishes he could convince this untoward page of his extreme love for 'Rosalind,' the disguised 'Rosalind' says merrily, "Me believe it? You may as soon make her that you love believe it; which, I warrant, she is apter to do, than to confess she does: that is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their

consciences. But, in good sooth," she adds, suddenly changing her tone into tender, trustful entreaty, "are you he that hangs the verses on the trees, wherein 'Rosalind' is so admired?" And then again she asks, "But *are* you so much in love as your rhymes speak?"

'Rosalind' turned the side of her face to her lover, as if her ear wished to drink in the sweet assurance; and her eyes, which fronted the audience, stared vacantly before her, as if they too were only interested in listening; while a light, happy smile dawned upon her lips. Suddenly the eyes, vacantly gazing into the deep theatre, seemed to start into a faint surprise, and a deadly pallor overspread her face. She tried to collect herself—'Orlando' had already answered—she stumbled, looked half-wildly at him for a moment, and then burst into tears. The house was astonished, and then struck with

a fit of admiration which expressed itself in rounds of applause. To them it was no hysterical climax to a long series of sad and solitary reveries, but a transcendant piece of stage effect. It was the over-excited 'Rosalind' who had just then burst into tears of joy on learning how much her lover loved her.

'Orlando' was for the moment taken aback; but the applause of the people gave him time to recover himself, and he took her hand, and went on with the part as if nothing had happened. He, and the people in the stage-boxes saw that her tears were real, and that she could scarcely continue the part for a sort of half-hysterical sobbing; but the majority of those in the theatre were convinced that Annie Brunel was the greatest actress they had ever seen, and wondered why the newspapers had spoken so coldly of her performance.

Will knew that she had seen him; he had caught that swift, electric glance. But, not knowing any reason why the seeing him should produce such profound emotion, he, too, fancied that her bursting into tears was a novel and pretty piece of acting. However, for his own sake, he did not wish to sit longer there; and so he rose and left.

But the streets outside were so cold and dark compared with Arden! The chill night air, the gloomy shadows of the broad thoroughfare, the glare of gas-lamps on the pavement, and the chatter of cabmen, were altogether too great a change from 'Rosalind' and the poetry-haunted forest. Nor could he bear the thought of leaving her there among those happy faces, in the warm and joyous atmosphere of romance, while he walked solitarily home to his solitary chambers. He craved for her society, and was content to share it with hundreds of

strangers. Merely to look upon her face was such a delight to him that he yielded himself to it irrespective of consequences. So he walked round to another entrance, and stole into a corner of the pit.

Was the delight or the torture the greater? He was now within view of the rows of well-dressed men and women in the stalls, who seemed so pleased with 'Rosalind.' It is one of the profound paradoxes of love, that while making selfish men unselfish and generous to a degree, it begets in the most unselfish of men an unreasoning and brutal self-regard. He hated them for their admiration. He hated them the more especially that their admiration was worth having. He hated them because their admiration was likely to please Annie Brunel.

It might have been imagined that his anger would have been directed chiefly

against those idiotic drapers' assistants and clerks who sate and burlesqued the piece, and sneered at the actress. But no ; it was the admiration of the intelligent and accomplished part of the audience he feared; was it not sufficient to interpose between him and her a subtle barrier ? He could have wished that the whole theatre was hissing her, that so his homage and tenderness and respect might be accounted as of some worth. He fancied she was in love with the theatre, and he hated all those attractions of the theatre which caused her love, with a profound and jealous hatred.

At length the play came to an end, and there was no longer an excuse for his remaining, as Annie Brunel, of course, did not play in the short piece which followed. So he went outside, and in getting into the street he found himself behind the two wine-merchants who had been in the box.

"Why not?" said the one to the other, gaily. "If she gets into a rage, so much the better fun. 'Rosalind' must be d—d pretty in a fury."

"All right," said the other, with a hiccup.

Will had heard the words distinctly; and the mere suspicion they suggested caused his blood to boil. When the two men turned into the narrow lane leading round to the stage-door of the theatre, he followed them with his mouth hard and firm, and his eyes not looking particularly amiable.

At the entrance to the lane stood Miss Brunel's cab. He recognised the face of the venerable jarvie who was accustomed to wait for her every evening.

He passed up the lane; the two men had paused in front of the small wooden door, and were trying to decipher, by the aid of the lamp overhead, the features of whomsoever passed in or out.

"She won't be here for an hour," said one of them.

"Shouldn't wonder if she went home in Rosalind's dress," said the other, with another hiccup.

"She'll 'it you, Arry, if you speak to her."

"Let her. I'd rather like it, 'pon my soul."

The stage-door was continually being swung to and fro by some one passing in or out, but as yet there was no sign of Annie Brunel. At length, however, some of the people who had been engaged in the play came out, and Will knew that she would soon follow.

"Was she likely to be alone? Would they dare to speak to her?" He glanced down at the sling which supported his right arm. Deprive an Englishman of the use of his right arm, and he feels himself utterly

helpless. There was one happy thought, however: even if she were alone she would be closely veiled; and how were these half-tipsy cads to recognise her?

She came out; she was alone, and veiled, but Will knew the graceful figure, and the carriage of the queenly head.

By some demoniac inspiration the two men seemed also to take it for granted that the veiled face was that of Annie Brunel. The less tipsy of the two went forward, overtook her as she was going down the lane, and said to her—

"I beg your pardon, Miss — Miss Brunel——"

She turned her head, and in the gaslight Anerley saw that there was a quick, frightened look of interrogation in her eyes. She turned away again, and had hurried on almost to the open street, when the man caught her arm with his hand.

"Not so fast, my dear. Won't you look at my card——"

"Out of the way, idiot!" was the next thing she heard, in a voice that made her heart beat; and in a moment the man had been sent reeling against the opposite wall.

That was the work of an instant. Inflamed with rage and fury, he recovered himself, and was about to aim a blow at his assailant's face, when Anerley's left arm so successfully did duty without the aid of the wounded right one, that the man went down like a log, and lay there. His companion, stupefied, neither stirred nor spoke.

"Get into the cab, Miss Brunel," said Will, abruptly.

He accompanied her across the pavement: an utter stranger could not have been more calm and cold. For a second she looked into his face, with pain, and wonder, and entreaty in her eyes; and then she took his

hand, which had been outstretched to bid her good-bye, and said—

"Wont you come with me? I—I am afraid——"

He got into the cab; the driver mounted his box and drove off; and so it was that Will, scarcely knowing how it had come about, found himself sitting once more beside Annie Brunel, with her hand still closed upon his.

CHAPTER XI.

A LAST WORD.

EVERY one knows Noel Paton's "Dante and Beatrice"—the picture of the two lovers caught together in a supreme moment of passion: their faces irradiated with the magical halo of a glowing twilight. His, tender, entreating, wistful, worshipful; hers, full of the unconscious sweetness and superb repose of an indescribably exalted beauty. His eyes are upturned to hers; but hers dwell vaguely on the western warmth of life. And there is in the picture more than one thing which suggests the strange disassociation and the sad-

ness, as well as the intercommunion and fellowship, of the closest love.

Why, asks the impatient reader, should not a romance be always full of this glow, and colour, and passion? The warm light that touches the oval outline of a tender woman's face is a beautiful thing, and even the sadness of love is beautiful: why should not a romance be full of these supreme elements? Why should not the romancist cut out the long prose passages of a man's life, and give us only those wonderful moments in which being glows with a sort of transformation?

The obvious reason is, that a romance written in such an exalted key would be insufferably unreal and monotonous: even in the "Venetianisches Gondellied," full of pure melody as it is, one finds horribly incongruous sharps and jarring chords which are only introduced to heighten the keen

delight of the harmony which is to follow. Add to this the difficulty of setting down in words any tolerable representation of one of those passionate, joyous moments of love-delight which are the familiar theme of the musician and the painter.

That moment, however, in which Will Anerley met Annie Brunel's eyes, and took her hand, and sat down beside her, was one of these. For many past days and weeks his life had been so unbearably dull, stagnant, prosaic, that the mere glad fact of this meeting drove from his mind all consideration of consequences. He looked in her eyes—the beautiful eyes that could not conceal their pleasure—and forgot everything else. For a time, neither of them spoke: the delight of being near to each other was enough; and when they began to recall themselves to the necessity of making some excuse to each other for

having broken a solemn promise, they were driving along Piccadilly; and, away down in the darkness, they could see the luminous string of orange points that encircle the Green Park.

"I only returned to London to-day," he said, and there was a smile on his face, for he half-pitied his own weakness; "and I could not help going to see you. That was how I kept my promise. But you are not very angry?"

"No," she said, looking down.

There was no smile upon *her* face. The events of the last few weeks had been for her too tragic to admit of humorous lights.

"You ought not to have come," she said the next minute, hurriedly. "You ought to have stayed away. You yourself spoke of what might happen; and the surprise and the pain of seeing you—I had no thought of your being there—and I was

sufficiently miserable at the time not to need any other thing to disturb me—and now—and now you are here, and you and I are the friends we have been——"

The passionate earnestness of this speech, to say nothing of its words, surprised and astounded him: why should *she* have reason to be disturbed?

"Why should we not be friends?" he said.

She looked at him with her big, tender, frank eyes with a strange expression.

"You force me to speak. Because we cannot continue friends," she said, in a voice which was almost harsh in its distinctness. "After what you said to me, you have no right to see me. I cannot forget your warning; and I know where you ought to be this evening—not here, but down in St. Mary-Kirby."

"That is true enough," said Will, gloomily.

"I couldn't have gone down to St. Mary-Kirby to-night: but, as you say, I have no business to be near you—none whatever. I should not have gone to the theatre; I ought to have stayed at home, and spent the time in thinking of you—why shouldn't I say it, now that you have been so frank with me? You and I know each other pretty well, do we not? There is no reason, surely, why we may not regard each other as friends, whatever may happen. And why should I not tell you that I fear to go down to St. Mary-Kirby, and meet that poor Dove who has given me her heart?"

She said nothing: what could she say? It was not for her to blame him.

"And when I went to the theatre, I said 'it is the last time!' I could not help going. I did not intend to meet you when you came out."

"You did not?" she said.

There was, despite herself, a touch of disappointment in her tone. The strange joyous light that had passed over her face on seeing him was the result of a sudden thought that he loved her so well that he was forced to come to her.

"No," he answered, "I did not intend to meet you; but the sudden pleasure of seeing you was so great that I had not the heart to refuse to come into the cab. And now you know my secret, you may blame me as you please. I suppose I am weaker than other men; but I did not err wilfully. And now the thing is done, it is Dove whom I most consider. How can I go to her with a lie in every word, and look, and action? Or how could I tell her the truth? Whichever way one turns there is nothing but sadness and misery."

And still there was no word from the young girl opposite.

"I have not even the resource of blaming destiny," he continued. "I must blame my own blindness. Only you, looking at these things in your friendly and kindly way, will not blame me further for having indulged myself a last time in going to see you to-night. You will never have to complain again—never; and indeed I went to-night in a manner to bid you good-bye—so you won't be hard on me——"

He was surprised to see, by the gleam of the lamp they passed, that the girl was covertly sobbing, and that the large soft eyes were full of tears. At the same moment, however, the cabman pulled up at the corner of the little square in which Annie Brunel lived; and so they both got out. When Will turned from paying the cabman, she had walked on a bit in advance, and had not entered the square. He overtook her, and offered her his arm. The

night was fine and still; a large, lambent planet lay like a golden bell-flower in the soft purple before them, and a large harvest moon, bronzed and discoloured, glimmered through the tall elms on the other side of the way, as it slowly rose up from the horizon.

"I have something to say to you," he heard the soft, low voice say, "which I had hoped never to have said. It is better it should be said."

"If you have cause to blame me, or if you wish to prevent my seeing you again by upbraiding me for having spoken honestly to you, I beg of you to say nothing that way. It is not needed. You will run no danger whatever of being annoyed again. I blame myself more than you can; and since we must part, let us part friends, with a kindly recollection of each other——"

"Don't speak like that!" she said, im-

ploringly, with another convulsive sob, "or you will break my heart. Is it not enough that—that—oh! I cannot, cannot tell you, and yet I must tell you!"

"What have you to tell me?" he said, with a cold feeling creeping over him. He began to suspect what her emotion meant; and he shrank from the suggestion as from some great evil he had himself committed.

"You will think me shameless; I cannot help it. You say this is our last meeting; and I cannot bear to have you go away from me with the thought that you have to suffer alone. You think I ought to give you my sympathy, because I am your friend, and you will not be happy. But—but I will suffer too; and I am a woman—and alone—and whom have I to look to—?"

He stopped her, and looked down into her face.

"Annie, is this true?" he said, sadly and gravely.

He got no answer beyond the sight of her streaming eyes and quivering lips.

"Then are we the two wretchedest of God's creatures," he said.

"Ah, don't say that," she murmured, venturing to look up at him through her tears. "Should we not be glad to know that we can think kindly of each other, without shame? Unhappy, yes!—but surely not the very wretchedest of all. And you won't misunderstand me? You won't think, afterwards, that it was because I was an actress that I confessed this to you——"

Even in such a moment a touch of Bohemianism!—a fear that her mother's profession should suffer by her weakness.

"Dearest," he said, tenderly, "for you are, God help me! my very, very dearest—we

now know each other too well to have to make excuses for our confidence in each other."

They walked on now quite silently; there was too much for both of them to think about to admit of speech. As they walked southward, down the long and sombre thoroughfares, the large moon on their left slowly rose, and still rose, at every minute losing its copper colour and gaining in clear, full light. They knew not whither they were going. There was no passer-by to stare at them; they were alone in the world, with the solitary houses, and the great moon.

"You have not told me a minute too soon," he said, suddenly, with a strange exultation in his tone.

"What do you mean?"

"You and I, Annie, love each other. If the future is to be taken from us, let us

recompense ourselves *now*. When you walk back to your house to-night, and the door closes, you and I see each other no more. To-morrow, and all the to-morrows after that, we are only strangers. But for the next half-hour—my dearest, my dearest! show me your face and let me see what your eyes say!—why should we not forget all these coming days and live that half-hour for ourselves? It is but a little time; the sweetness of it will be a memory to us. Let us be lovers, Annie!—only for this little time we shall be together, my dearest! Let us try to imagine that you and I are to be married to-morrow—that all the coming years we are to be together—that now we have nothing to do but to yield ourselves up to our love——"

"I am afraid," she said, in a low voice, trembling.

"Why afraid, then?"

"That afterwards the recollection will be too bitter."

"Darling, nothing that you can imagine is likely to be more bitter than what you and I must bear. Just now, we have a little time our own; let us forget what is to come, and——"

"Whisper, then," she said.

He bent down his head to her, and she came close to his ear.

"*Will, I love you, and if I could I would be your wife to-morrow.*"

"And you will kiss me, too," he said.

He felt a slight, warm touch on his lips; and when he raised his head his face was quite white, and his eyes were wild.

"Why, we *are* to be married to-morrow!" he said. "It will be about eleven when I reach the church, and I shall walk up and down between the empty pews until you come—I see the whole thing now—you

walking in at the door with your friends, your dear eyes a little frightened, looking at me as if you wanted me to take you away at once from among the people. Then we shall be off, dearest, sharp and fast, up to your house; you will hurry to change your things, and then, with a good-bye to everybody, we are off, we two, you and I, Annie, away anywhere, so that we may be alone together. And I wish to God, Annie, that you and I were lying down there, beneath that water, dead and drowned!"

They had come to the river—the broad, smooth river, with the wonderful breadths of soft light upon it, and the dark olive-green shadows of the sombre wharves and buildings on the other side.

"Will, Will, you frighten me so!" she said, clinging to his arm.

"You needn't be frightened," he said, sadly. "I am only telling you what might

happen. Can't you see all these things when you try to see them? For many a night past—ever since the evening we spent overlooking the Rhine—I have seen that marriage-scene before my eyes, and it is always you who are there. You remember that evening when you sate up in the balcony, among the vine leaves, with the moon hanging up over the river? There's a German song I once heard that warns you never to go near the Rhine, because life is too sweet there; and we have been there, and have received the curse of this discontent and undying regret."

Then he broke out into a bitter laugh.

"We were to be lovers; and this is pretty lovers' talk."

"You really do frighten me, Will," she said. "I never saw you look so before. Oh, my dear, don't be so very, very sad and despairing, for I have nothing to comfort you

with—not even one poor word; and it seems so wretched that we two should not be able to comfort each other."

He was fighting with the bonds of circumstance; and his impotence embittered him. The spectacle of these two wretched creatures—despairing, rebellious, and driven almost beyond the bounds of reason by their perplexity—walking along the side of the still and peaceful stream, was one to have awakened the compassion, or at least the sympathetic merriment of the most careless of the gods. What a beautiful night it was! The deep olive shadows of the moonlight hid away the ragged and tawdry buildings that overhung the river; and the flood of yellow-tinged light touched only here and there on the edge of a bank or the stem of a tree, and then fell gently on the broad bosom of the stream. The gas-lamps of the nearest bridge glimmered palely in that

white light; but deep in the shadows along the river the lamps burned strong and red, and sent long, quivering lines of fire down into the dark water beneath. Further up the stream lay broad swathes of moonlight, vague and indeterminate as the grey continents visible in the world of silver overhead. In all this universe of peace, and quiet, and harmony, there seemed to be only these two beings restless, embittered, and hopeless.

"Let us go home," he said, with an effort. "I can do nothing but frighten you and myself too. I tell you there are other things pass before my eyes as well as the marriage-scene, and I don't want to see any more of them. It will be time enough to think of what may happen when it does happen."

"And whatever happens, Will, shall we not at least know that we sometimes

— occasionally — think tenderly of each other?"

"So you wish us to be lovers still!" he said. "The delusion is too difficult to keep up. Have you reflected that when once I am married, neither of us may think of each other at all?"

"Will! Will! don't talk like that! You speak as if somebody had cruelly injured you, and you were angry and revengeful. Nobody has done it. It is only our misfortune. It cannot be helped. If I am not to think of you—and I shall pray God to help me to forget you—so much the better."

"My poor darling!" he said, "I am so selfish that I think less of what your future may be than of my own. You dare not confide your secret to any one; and I, who know it, must not see you nor try to comfort you. Is not the very confidence that

prompted you to tell me, a proof that we are—that we might have been happy as husband and wife?"

"Husband and wife," she repeated, musingly, as they once more drew near home. "You will be a husband, but I shall never be a wife."

"And yet, so long as you and I live," he said, quite calmly, "you will have my whole love. It cannot be otherwise: we need not seek to conceal it. Whatever happens, and wherever we may be, my love goes with you."

"And if mine," she whispered, "could go with you, and watch over you, and teach your heart to do right, it would lead your love back to the poor girl whom you are going to marry, and make her happy."

At parting he kissed her tenderly, almost solemnly. Then she quickly undid from

her neck a little brooch, and put it in his hand with these words—

"Give that to her, with my love, *and with yours.*"

END OF VOL. II.